



**Red Lovers and Mothers on the Silver Screen:  
Hollywood's Feminine Lens on the Soviet Debate from 1933-1945**

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## **Abstract**

The main goal of this thesis is to examine images of Russians in Hollywood film from 1933 to 1945, the years representing U.S. recognition of the U.S.S.R. through their WWII partnership as allies to the conclusion of the war. To narrow the focus of this study, films covered within this argument focus solely on images of Soviet-era Russian women. The woman plays an important role in these films, often standing as a metaphor for the Soviet nation and provides a useful trope to define the United States' myth of nation, approach to foreign policy, and cultural understanding of the Russian people. I argue that Hollywood film feminized the image of Russia in film and defined her as the "Other" to help both justify the United States' ideological fears and illustrate our desires for its political behavior on the body and actions of the female. Of primary importance to my argument are films such as *Ninotchka*, *Comrade X*, *North Star*, *Song of Russia*, and *Days of Glory*, which feature Russian women in two archetypal roles: as lover or mother. Following the argument that images of Russian women are tropes within these films that persist to this day, I explore how gender coding has helped restructure and reinforce structures of American society and history through a process of Americanizing the image and reinforcing the patriarchal power system of the United States. In this context, the lover and mother are actually not realistic representations of Russian ideology or culture but are evocative symbols that are employed to define "Otherness" of a foreign people in terms of the American status quo, reflect and to define the culture of the U.S. nation, and justify its political motives.

In Europe and America, there's a growing feeling of hysteria  
Conditioned to respond to all the threats  
In the rhetorical speeches of the Soviets  
Mr. Khrushchev said we will bury you  
I don't subscribe to this point of view  
It would be such an ignorant thing to do  
If the Russians love their children too

How can I save my little boy from Oppenheimer's deadly toy  
There is no monopoly in common sense  
On either side of the political fence  
We share the same biology  
Regardless of ideology  
Believe me when I say to you  
I hope the Russians love their children too

There is no historical precedent  
To put the words in the mouth of the President  
There's no such thing as a winnable war  
It's a lie we don't believe anymore  
Mr. Reagan says we will protect you  
I don't subscribe to this point of view  
Believe me when I say to you  
I hope the Russians love their children too

We share the same biology  
Regardless of ideology  
What might save us, me, and you  
Is if the Russians love their children too

Sting, "Russians" from *The Dream of the Blue Turtles*, 1985

### **Introduction**

Russia and the United States are famous, or perhaps infamous, for their dramatic and uncertain relationship. As nations with disparate political and social ideologies, their relationship has shifted to and fro between ally, enemy, and calculating competitor since the early days of Soviet revolt, when political upheaval in the Russian state threatened United States' democratic ideology.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In 1917, two revolutions shook the Russian nation. The February Revolution removed Tsar Nicholas II from power, deposed the autocratic regime, and set up a provisional government in its wake. A second uprising, the October Revolution, overturned the interim government and established the Soviet Union. This second uprising

The tumultuous relationship between these two nations, an ideological tug of war often resulting in political aggression,<sup>2</sup> has long captured the minds of artists, musicians, and filmmakers of both American and international origin. The lyrics above, penned by British songsmith Sting, are but one example of Russian and US political rhetoric pushing its way into popular media.<sup>3</sup> Sting's words reflect a period of heightened aggression between Russia and the US, when the possibility of military retaliation through nuclear deterrent hung in the air like a silent threat.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to Sting's song, there are many other artistic works whose subject is Mother Russia and her uneasy political path with the US. Perhaps the most significant of these creations, and the least comprehensively analyzed, is Hollywood film depicting America's relationship with Russia and the Russian people.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of this paper is neither to give an overview of all

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was led by the Bolshevik party, an extremist group who abandoned the democratic process in January of 1918, declaring themselves representatives of the proletariat (the working class) and placing their leader, Vladimir Lenin, in a position of power. The Bolshevik Revolution paved the way for communist revolt. For more information on revolutionary Russia and communist ideology see Saul, 1-43.

<sup>2</sup> From wary recognition of the Soviet state in the early 1930s to partnership as WW II allies and later Cold War enemies, the US and Russia have shared a multifaceted diplomatic relationship. The two superpowers have often struggled for control, particularly in the areas of foreign and economic policy. Russia's commitment to a Marxist-Leninist ideology and the US support of Capitalism and free elections once created a strong ideological clash that set the two nations at opposing ends. Present day conflict exists in the year this project has been researched and composed. Russia's aggressive military presence in the independent state of Ukraine and new economic countersanctions lobbied at the US create mounting tensions in 2014. For more on new foreign developments between Russia and the U.S. see NY Times article, "St. Petersburg to Moscow and Back." *The New York Times* 17 Aug. 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Sting wrote this anti-war song in response to dirty politics of the Cold War. In a 1994 interview, Sting discusses the origins of the song, noting that his inspiration came from watching Russian morning shows in the middle of the night with a friend during the height of the "Reagan-Rambo paranoia years." His heart stirred at how lovingly made the kids shows appeared to be and began to question the deadly motives behind the US/Soviet feud. For more on the song's history and context, visit <<http://www.pophistorydig.com/?p=1703>> "Sting: 'Russians,' 1985.

<sup>4</sup> The Cold War began as WW II ended. In his study, *American Opinion and the Russian Alliance, 1939-1945*, U.S. historian Ralph B. Levering sums up the nascent formations of the conflict in this way: "The American people and their government had two basic choices. They could accept Russian predominance in the lands between Russia and Germany and have the strong likelihood of accommodation among the great powers, or they could contest virtually every move Russia made outside of her borders and have Cold War." America decided to contest the power of the Soviet Union, leading to a battle lasting near fifty years (1947-1991). For the historical background of the Cold War, see Levering, 200-209.

<sup>5</sup> There are approximately twenty-two Hollywood productions released during the years spanning from the US recognitions of the USSR to the culmination of WW II in 1945. I am analyzing several of these films based on their

Hollywood film depicting Russia nor analyze the reception or popularity of these films among the American public. Instead, my goal is to closely examine Hollywood's Russian-genre cinema from two distinct time periods, the first lasting from 1931 to 1941 (US Recognition/Pre-WW II) and the second lasting from 1941-1945 (WW II and the US-Soviet Alliance). These years are significant because they represent periods of shifting international relations and public perceptions between the US and the Soviet Union. During these timeframes, US cultural attitudes toward Russia shifted from suspicion to friendship as fear of communist takeover gave way to compassion and friendship during the WW II partnership.<sup>6</sup>

At the center of these shifting perceptions sits the Hollywood film industry and the pictures it produced about the Russian people. But why is the Hollywood film industry so indicative of America's cultural and political attitudes toward the Soviet Union? It is precisely because, in the words of expert marketer Seth Godin, "Stories make it easier to understand the world. Stories are the only way we know how to spread an idea."<sup>7</sup> The Hollywood film industry was and still is the biggest storyteller in the world. Films offer narratives about life and real world events, forming a viewpoint of the world and sharing it with the public. This brings us to our key question: How did Hollywood portray Russians in film and what was the meaning of that portrayal? The answer to this question is full of complexities, for there are multiple political, economic, and social forces dictating

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depiction of the Soviet woman. For a complete list of Hollywood films produced during this time period and their synopsis, see Appendix I.

<sup>6</sup> Americans had plenty of reasons to fear Soviet Communism, particularly as the possibility of WW II crested in the late 1930s. Rumors of Stalin's greatest period of purges under Nikolai Yezhov, head of the Soviet Secret Police, infiltration of communist propaganda via American Leftist advocates, and building arguments between conservatives denouncing Stalinism's raids and economic policies and American Communist Party leaders stating a future war between fascists leaders, including Stalin, were only speculation. These fears were somewhat assuaged when the US partnered with the Soviet Union after Hitler broke the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and attacked the Soviet Union through its "bread basket, forcing the Soviet Union to partner with the Allies. For more on shifting public perception, including American apathy to Soviet aggression, see Levering, 3-38.

<sup>7</sup> Godin, 2.

the production and composition of these films. I would argue, however, that in spite of these complexities there is one tool employed by almost all Russian-genre romances and wartime films as a symbolic embodiment of our attitude toward the Soviet state. This is the character of the Soviet woman. In these films, the Soviet woman helps define American myths of nation by functioning as a symbol of the country itself. “She” is a metaphor for the Soviet state and the image of country is at once feminized and marginalized to match U.S. attitudes toward the country, whether positive or negative.

The feminization of Russia’s image through Hollywood romances and war time cinema is not a new argument, nor is it a unique perspective. While no film theorists or film critics have dealt at length with this topic, a number of academics have analyzed the subtext of Russian-genre romance and wartime pictures to uncover its underlying meanings from both a political and cultural perspective. Dana Heller of Old Dominion University argues that Hollywood Russian-genre romances position the Soviet both “as an object of our demise and our desire,” reflecting both national intrigue and suspicion of the Soviet Union’s political motivations. To bolster her argument, Heller analyzes the film *Ninotchka* (MGM, 1939), where main character Nina’s (Greta Garbo) commitment to the Soviet cause is slowly eroded by the temptation offered by a western man’s (Melvyn Douglas) playboy-style charm and superficial excesses (i.e. wealth, possessions, and middle-class comforts). Heller surmises that *Ninotchka*, and the many other knock-offs it inspired, established a popular narrative pattern in which Russian women are portrayed as both alluring and dangerous (e.g. Soviet women are dangerous in their willingness to abandon their cause and convert). The result is an “eroticization and demonization” of the masses that projects a sense of female sexuality on the uncontrollable, unruly Russian mob of revolution. When one considers the Soviet cinematic woman as a metaphor for the unruly Russian mob, she becomes a “...visual

receptacle for all kinds of projections, projections, displaced fears, and anxieties (both personal and political) which were brought about by modernization and the new social conflicts..."<sup>8</sup> Many of these Hollywood romances, including *Comrade X* with Hedy Lamarr and Clark Gable, were produced during a period of great uncertainty towards the Soviet Union. This period fell in the years between America's formal recognition of the Soviet Union in November of 1933 and eventual partnership as its ally in World War II. During this short time period, America's previous openness to Soviet culture and experimentation<sup>9</sup> was set back by the Comintern's financing of the Communist Party of America and its propaganda, as well as rumors of Stalin's brutal purges.<sup>10</sup> The result was mixed feelings about the growing power of the Soviet Union and its ideological motives.

Juxtaposed to Hollywood films presenting dangerous and alluring images of Soviet women, are wartime films about the Soviet Union. These films offer an entirely different perspective on Soviet-American relations, emphasizing a partnership between the two countries despite vastly different political ideologies. One key feature of these films, shot between the years of 1941-1945 during the accommodative war alliance, is their emphasis on shared human values such as patriotism, generosity, and romantic love. In many of these films, maternal values are embodied by female characters who sacrifice their self-preservation and safety for love of community and country. Immediate examples include the young Claudia (Jane Withers) from MGM's saccharine wartime melodrama the *North Star* (1943) and Nina Ivanova (Tamara Toumanova, star of the Ballet Russe) from *Days of Glory* (1943). Both Claudia and Nina are pacifists who, inspired by their

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<sup>8</sup>Huyssen as quoted by Heller, 98.

<sup>9</sup> In Norman E. Saul's historical text "Friends or Foes: The United States & Russia 1921-1941," Soviet-American cultural relations are discussed in-depth. Saul describes a period of time stemming from the early 1920s to early 1930s (during America's nonrecognition of the Soviet Union) in which the arts (music, literature, and dance) meshed together in a symbiotic cultural exchange. Saul even describes each country as contributing to the Jazz Age, as musicians and dancers traveled to and fro between the countries to explore new musical advancements. Saul, 136-208.

<sup>10</sup> See Saul, 263-265.



townspeople's brave actions in the face of Nazi bomber attacks, rise in defense of their nation. Their actions are heroic and admirable, designed by Hollywood directors and big government to align American viewers with the war cause.<sup>11</sup>

In their analysis of Hollywood Russian-genre films, Michael Strada and Harold Troper offer a summarization of the subtext of these wartime films: "The [films] inform audiences that Russians are brave people dying in defense of their homeland; they come from close-knit families and are romantics who fall deeply in love; they also have good leaders who are dependable allies."<sup>12</sup> The primary purpose of wartime productions was to act as patriotic propaganda, conveying a singular message that Americans should help the Russians. To more clearly communicate this message, American gender politics were imbedded in the narrative and imagery. Made with the conventions of traditional Hollywood cinema, wartime Russian-genre films put female characters on a pedestal as supreme examples of love but also marginalized them by allowing an American man to swoop in and rescue them from devastation. Hollywood films coded the Soviet nation as a soft, self-sacrificing female with mother-like qualities and America as the masculine tough-guy offering protection and power.

What does the feminization of the Soviet's image mean in the context of America's social and political culture? And why were women used as the primary vehicle for expressing the

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<sup>11</sup>In the autumn of 1941 the Roosevelt administration recognized the need to garner the American public's support of the nation's strange bedfellow, the Soviet Union. The president, along with representatives of the Office of War Information, approached Hollywood with a strange request. They wanted Hollywood executives to make pictures that would assist Americans in understanding our new ally. As noted by scholar George Martin Day, an unorganized group of nearly 1,500 anti-Bolshevik exiles resided in Los Angeles, many working as musicians, folk artists, and actors in the motion picture industry. Their involvement in the film industry, along with the support of major studio producers whose familial ties to displaced or immigrant Eastern European Jews (e.g., Samuel Goldwyn) created the perfect impetus for producing pro-Russian and anti-Fascist films. See both Day, 1-4, and Robinson, 116-118.

<sup>12</sup> See Strada and Troper, 44.

vicissitudes of American feelings for the Soviet state? The feminine gendering of the Soviet Union serves but one purpose: to marginalize the country and bring “her,” metaphorically, under the controlling, patriarchal thumb of the United States. By personifying the Soviet Union as female, the Hollywood film industry was able to project US wishes for how the Soviet Union might act or what type of country it might become in a manner consistent with U.S. political needs. I am especially interested in how this type of imagining might have worked in the long term inspiring Hollywood’s continued depiction of the Russian people and their “Otherness” as both intoxicating and threatening. Thus, this analysis of Russian-genre romances and wartime films demonstrates how Hollywood supplied an image of the Soviet Union that marginalized its power as a sovereign state by placing the U.S. in a position of political supremacy and ideological authority. To convey this message, Hollywood film employed two familiar female tropes—the lover and the mother—to create a national myth of U.S. dominance that is still prevalent in popular media today.

### **A Middling History: Recognition and Suspicion of the U.S.S.R. (1933-1940)**

To understand why female characters were used to represent the Soviet Union in Hollywood movies, it is first important to examine American social and political attitudes toward the nation and assess how these feelings may have influenced studio production of Russian-genre films. As stated by Bill Nichols in his book *Ideology and the Image*, "Traditionally film critics and theorists have made much of the relationship of film to reality. The cinema is a strongly representational art: it presents us with recognizable figures or objects whose lifelikeness is sometimes uncanny."<sup>13</sup> If film represents life as indicated by Nichols, what did Hollywood romance genre films about Russians like *Ninotchka* and *Comrade X* illustrate about the film industry's perceptions and reactions to Soviet-American relations?

Described by some historians as a "honeymoon" period between the Soviet Union and the United States, the 1930s represented a time of tremendous hope for improved relations followed by abysmal despair. In the early 1930s, the internal crisis brought on by the Great Depression captured Americans' minds and considerations more deeply than the olive branch of Soviet recognition offered by newly elected president, Franklin D. Roosevelt. However, the president persisted with his plan and on November 16, 1933, the United States extended formal diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union. Roosevelt saw many advantages to normalizing relations between the Soviet government and the United States, including increased trade relations, repayment of leftover debts from the defunct tsarist regime, and potentially limiting the rustlings of Japanese expansionism.<sup>14</sup> Roosevelt was more immediately interested in economics than ideology, but the

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<sup>13</sup> Nichols, 10.

<sup>14</sup> Strada and Troper, 2-10.

American public met his resolve to acknowledge the Soviet Union with a mixture of wariness and interest.

Initial sympathizers of Soviet recognition, both political and public advocates, found some redeeming qualities in communist ideology, particularly from an economic perspective. The Soviet economic model, especially Stalin's Five-Year Plans, was a welcome and hopeful alternative to the harsh realities of capitalism in Depression-era America.<sup>15</sup> Other less sympathetic parties viewed Soviet "friendship" with a tinge of unease. Their attitudes were marked by an unwillingness to get too involved in foreign affairs or sully America's position as "citadel of reason and virtue in an unreasonable and immoral world."<sup>16</sup>

As the decade progressed, initial optimism for improved Soviet-American relations was quickly dashed. Uncooperative in their agreements with the United States, the Soviet government proved difficult to work alongside. The Kremlin failed to pay off lingering debts, disabled building of a new American embassy in Lenin Hills, and all but shut the door to American tourism.<sup>17</sup> But perhaps the worst sin committed was the covert operations of the American Communist Party (ACP) and its Trojan-horse plan to infiltrate American institutions via a propagandist outreach program. This program, following the "popular front strategy," was established by the Communist International Party (ComIntern) in 1935. Designed to convert America from the inside out, the plan

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<sup>15</sup> Stalin launched Five-Year Plans in 1928-1932 and 1933-1937. A third plan began in 1938 but was shut down in the midst of World War II. Stalin's goal was to bring the Soviet Union into the industrial age through radical economic movement. Most Americans remained unaware of the failures of his first plan and the resulting mass starvation that swept the agricultural community. Saul, 251-253.

<sup>16</sup> During the 1930s many Americans still held an isolationist view of foreign affairs. Many believed that "foreign affairs were basically the business of foreigners." They would rather attend to internal issues than become involved in others ideological battles. For more on isolationist attitudes, see Levering, 15-38.

<sup>17</sup> The Soviet Union was marked by a rigorous police system, censoring financial information, military actions, and political moves. Few foreigners were allowed into the country as a result of the antiforeigner party and deep-seated fears of foreign influence on Soviet citizens' ideological convictions. Davis and Trani, 91.

proposed to penetrate any organization within democracies that would set communists in places of influence. A dispatch from William Bullitt, first US ambassador to the Soviet Union, points to the perceived dangers of communist ideology infiltrating America. He states, "The problem of relations with the Government of the Soviet Union is, therefore, a subordinate part of the problem presented by Communism as a militant faith determined to produce world revolution and the 'liquidation' (that is to say, murder) of all non-believers." Bullitt believed the overall aim of the Soviet Union and their foreign policy was to create world revolution. In his opinion, friendly diplomatic relations with other nations was only a guise designed to create a false peace that could quickly crumble when the Soviet Union was strong enough to attack.<sup>18</sup>

Bullitt's comments, recorded via dispatch at the middle of the decade, marked the return of a sense of hostility and mistrust toward the Soviet Union by government officials.<sup>19</sup> The impact of these comments held mostly to the government's interior and for the most part, the American public remained apathetic to troublesome Soviet-American relations through the mid-1930s. In his book *American Opinion and the Russian Alliance*, historian Ralph B. Levering credits this apathetic spirit to the remote sense of danger posed by the Soviet Union and the American people's overwhelming confidence in the moral rightness of the United States.<sup>20</sup> While the public remained largely indifferent, outbreaks of red paranoia bubbled under the surface. Rooted in fears first provoked during the Red Scare of the 1920s when hyper-nationalism and organized labor uprisings

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<sup>18</sup> For more on Bullitt's experience in the Soviet Union, including his communications with Stalin, see Davis and Trani, 80-104.

<sup>19</sup> Bullitt remained distrustful and dismayed but Roosevelt's second appointment to ambassador, Joseph Davies (1936-1938), assessed the Soviet problem in a different manner. After several carefully arranged tours from Soviet officials showcasing an abundance of natural resources and whitewashed, Soviet workers cheerfully building socialism, Davies assessed that the threat of Communism was nearly non-existent. His positive reactions to Soviet structure were later reflected in a national best-selling book and the pro-Soviet Hollywood film, *Mission to Moscow*. The American public was curious about the potential for Soviet success, but remained highly skeptical. Ibid, 97-110.

<sup>20</sup> See Levering, 16-17.

spurred the deportation of several thousand suspect foreign radicals and anarchists, the growing activities and patronage of the Communist Party of America caused Americans to grow even more suspicious of a communist takeover.<sup>21</sup> The public's mixed perceptions of the Soviet Union were only further fueled by popular journalism which frequently harped on negative Soviet-American foreign relation events. An article appearing in the *New York Times* on August 27, 1935 is indicative of this negative treatment. Titled, "U.S. Taken Aback by Soviet Curtness," the article describes how Soviet-American relations were "dampened" as a result of a note disclaiming Soviet-responsibility for all actions of the Communist International.<sup>22</sup>

This type of media and public discourse grew to a frenzy near the decade's end when Stalin's Great Terror, the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Non-Aggression Pact, and news of the Russo-Finnish War was sensationalized in headlines almost daily. The drama reached its apex when Generalissimo Stalin was named *Time's* Man of the Year and American literature and news dedicated multiple pages to communist infiltration in America. The *Times'* assessment of Stalin was highly influential, confirming America's suspicions of the Soviet state by matching Stalin with Hitler as the world's most hated man.<sup>23</sup>

At the end of the 1930s, according to Levering, the threat Americans feared most was the rising grip of totalitarianism abroad. The public viewed Russia as the disseminator of totalitarian concepts of social and political organization, spreading the germ of revolutionary social order from the Bolshevik uprising and eventually influencing political systems in Germany, Italy, and several

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<sup>21</sup> Wholesale raids targeting members of the Russian Workers Union (proponents of Bolshevism) netted more than a thousand arrests and resulted in the deportation of 439 immigrants. The raids were invoked, in part, to eliminate high profile radicals Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman. A second roundup of several thousand others followed in January and February of 1920. Saul, 6-7.

<sup>22</sup> "U.S. Taken Aback by Soviet Curtness." *The New York Times* 28 Aug. 1935.

<sup>23</sup> "Person of the Year: Joseph Stalin." *Time*. 1 Jan. 1940.

countries in Latin America and Asia. Russia was seen as the greater of two evils, although Hitler represented a more imminent threat. The threat of war at the hands of Germany and a more deep-seated fear of Communism is evident in the Gallup polls of the late 1930s. In 1938, pollsters asked three thousand adult Americans, "If there was a war between Germany and Russia, which side would you rather see win?" The winning response, by 82 percent, was Russia. An additional question asked which government Americans would prefer to live under, Germany's or Russia's. 59 percent chose Germany, revealing overarching anathema to the Soviet political system that outweighed even the imminent threat of world war. The antithesis between German antagonism and Soviet ideology was only further complicated by the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact guaranteeing Germany would not invade the USSR if the Soviet would remain neutral to German expansion.

According to film historians Strada and Troper, Soviet-American relations in the 1930s were "...marked by one unresolved dispute after another," resulting in a sense of inertia and ambivalence in foreign policy and public perception. This sense of unease would make its way into several Hollywood productions, where depictions of the Soviet Union appeared to teeter between "escapism" and "evasion of politics," both characteristic of the time.<sup>24</sup> Upon closer examination, the message was more direct, particularly toward the end of the decade when Hollywood film satirized Soviet ideology and also denounced it through romantic interludes between a Communist woman and an American man (examples of this cinematic plot structure include MGM's *Ninotchka* and *Comrade X*).

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<sup>24</sup> See Phillip Melling in *Cinema, Politics, and Society in America*, 7.

### **Red Lovers on the Silver Screen: Hollywood's Romance with the Defection Fairytale**

In the 1930s, the most popular films were lavish romances, historical dramas, and romantic comedies featuring the public's favorite film stars including Humphrey Bogart, James Cagney, Clark Gable, Marlene Dietrich, Carole Lombard, and Greta Garbo. Hollywood's aim was to create big budget escapist films that gently swept away the pain of bread lines and property foreclosures. Ironically, as the U.S. government tightened monetary spending, Hollywood became economically liberal, cranking out film after film to feed the national need for happy reassurance. Many films produced during this time are notable for their uplifting, whimsical beat, physical gags, and lively song and dance routines.<sup>25</sup>

During this era, Hollywood was dominated by big production companies: Metro-Goldwyn Mayer, Paramount, and Warner Brothers. This was a shining moment in film history when many of the motion pictures now lauded as "cinematic classics" made their silver screen debuts. This was also the decade where Hollywood found its footing, so to speak, as each big studio established an individual vision and voice. Each major studio operated as its own entity, creating its own culture and catering to a special audience. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) earned a reputation for making films that appealed to the middle class, Paramount found its audience in the upper class, and Warner Brothers sought to satisfy the working man's taste. Although each studio strove to offer a different "flavor" of film to match audience tastes, they were all united under a single code dictating what could and could not be produced. Instituted by several religious organizations and named after Hollywood's chief censor William Hays, the Motion Picture Production Code (MPPC)

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<sup>25</sup> Examples of "happy go lucky" films of the 1930s include *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* (Warner Brothers, 1933) and *It Happened One Night* (Columbia Pictures, 1934). Director Frank Capra, producer and director of *It Happened One Night*, was well-known for his films capturing American New Deal optimism. For more on Capra's optimistic narratives in a Soviet context, see Robinson, 60-61.



tried to rehabilitate Hollywood's public image by squelching distasteful or immoral subject matter on screen. Under code restrictions, bad language, sexual improprieties, drug use, and other perceived indiscretions were taboo.<sup>26</sup> To ensure their films met production codes and were able to generate maximum revenue, studio producers insisted on ultimate creative control over their final product.

Studio producers did not altogether ignore the Soviet debate during the 1930s. Many studio heads viewed the Western experience of the Soviet Union as a potentially intriguing vehicle for their major stars. Russian historian, Harlow Robinson, acknowledges Hollywood's interest in Russian-centric narratives in the early years of the 1930s. He states, "In the early 1930s, and particularly after the election of FDR ensured official relations with the USSR, several prominent studios tried to develop screenplays dealing with the human dimensions behind the dynamic story of the country's accelerated industrialization campaign. There was something in this story that had potential appeal for the American audience, itself dazzled by the marvels of mass production." But creating a narrative that showed the appropriate amount of interest and impartiality to Communism was a difficult task. Early productions such as *Soviet*, a screenplay written by Frank Capra featuring warring ideologies, were scrapped entirely for their strong political overtones.<sup>27</sup>

To resolve the issue of representation, Hollywood spent a significant portion of the decade dipping back into the folds of history rather than focusing on the ambiguous political situation of present day. From 1933 to 1937, Russian genre film narratives focused on old stories of the Russian aristocracy or featured potboiler spy mysteries set against the backdrop of World War I. One shared

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<sup>26</sup> Harold and Troper, 13-16.

<sup>27</sup> Louis B. Mayer could never resolve political sensitivities surrounding a script titled "Soviet" where an American man and Communist woman strive to convert one another to their respective ideology during the building of a dam in the Soviet heartland. The picture was never completed. Robinson, 60-62.

aspect of these films was a love connection, sometimes fatal, other times idyllic. In literary tales such as Josef Von Sternberg's *Catherine the Great* (Paramount, 1934) with Marlene Dietrich and Clarence Brown's *Anna Karenina* (MGM, 1935) with Greta Garbo, dramatic heartache is the primary plot conceit. In these films, Russian royalty or members of the aristocracy fall in love with the wrong men (i.e., army officials or a non-spouse), bear illegitimate children, and eventually end their lives under tragic circumstances.<sup>28</sup> In World War I spy tales, such as George Archainbaud's *After Tonight* (RKO Radio Pictures, 1934) and George Fitzmaurice's *The Emperor's Candlesticks* (MGM, 1937), in which a love-conquers-all motif is applied liberally. Both films feature female Russian spies who encounter dangerous yet devastatingly handsome male spies fighting for the opposition. When the warring spies meet, the female succumbs to her male counterpart in a fit of passion, finding his charm and machismo more appealing than her political obligations. As love takes center stage and sexism is liberally applied, Russia's social problems are overhauled. Principles of communist belief and the volatility of Russia's recent past (e.g., the Bolshevik takeover, Russian civil war, Lenin's political theories, etc.) are conveniently swept under the rug without further contemplation.

It is impossible to look to any of these films as markers of contemporary socio-political politics with the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Each Hollywood production from 1933-1938 conveniently replaces true socio-political issues with silly historical props, dizzying love affairs, and overly positive representations of the Russian people. As noted by Strada and Troper, the frequent use of the love conquers all trope endows these productions with a "middling" nature. These films neither fully condemned nor praised the Soviet Union, gently satirizing ideological flaws in a humoristic manner. Strada and Troper state, "Where the Soviet system gets portrayed as

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<sup>28</sup>Marlene Dietrich played Catherine the Great with her token acerbic flair and Greta Garbo, a common Hollywood Russian genre actress, played Anna Karenina with stoic panache.

inefficient, even nearly dysfunctional, it is not so much condemned as teased in a jocular, ribbing way. Russian people are generally likeable and mostly apolitical characters preoccupied by love relationships.” This study underscores the studio system’s aversion to dealing with American-Soviet realities in the early to mid-1930s.<sup>29</sup> Hollywood studios were generally unwilling to paint a wholly negative image of the Communist system and the Russian people, hesitant to take a firm stand either for or against the ideology for the sake of sensitive viewers. An analysis of the studio system’s business goals indicates that the decision to avoid representing ideological strife on screen was both *financially* and *politically* motivated: Hollywood producers recognized that stories of royalty and melodramatic intrigue (exemplified by the competing spy motif), were crowd pleasers for audiences seeking entertainment and escapism over reality. Further, many directors and screenwriters harbored significant doubts about the virtues of Communism and hesitated to put forth material that could alienate or disturb sensitive audiences.<sup>30</sup>

Avoiding the issues made it necessary for screenwriters and directors to find inventive ways to deal with delicate representations of Russian and American characters on screen. Scenes of nineteenth and twentieth-century Russian life showed the simple joys of Russian peasant life and featured both peasants and members of the aristocracy singing and dancing to traditional Russian folk ballads, a truly romanticized vision that presented an idyllic society unmarred by hardship for either class (of note are Paramount Pictures’ *The Scarlet Empress*, 1934, and MGM’s *Balalaika*, 1939). World War I spy dramas bring European secret agents with opposing viewpoints together through personal metamorphosis and the desire to join forces for the greater good (of note are

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<sup>29</sup> For more on Hollywood’s ambivalence to the mounting ideological clash between the U.S. and Soviet Union, see Strada and Troper, 19-27.

<sup>30</sup> See both Robinson, 34 and Strada and Troper, 10-11 for more detail on the importance of escapism in 1930s Hollywood cinema to boost ticket sales.

RKO's *After Tonight*, 1933 and First National Pictures' *British Agent*, 1934). Another motif that worked well was the romantic melodrama, where Hollywood's Russian women "...turn to putty in the hands of the right man."<sup>31</sup> This type of scheme, titled the "conversion" or "defection" plot, features a steel-nosed Soviet woman who transitions her beliefs from Communist ideology to free-wheeling capitalism as a result of the charming manipulations and love-making of an American man.

Dana Heller argues that the conversion plot is the narrative style most disposed to portraying Russia as it was truly perceived by the American national body. She explains this idea by stating that "...there is a dual impulse to portray Russia—at one and the same time—as the agent of our demise and the object of our desire. Arguably the narrative mode most amenable to the task of negotiating such a relationship is romance..."<sup>32</sup> From Heller's viewpoint, the conversion plot became a key tool for shaping US foreign policy and developing a myth of nation. Heller argues this type of plot formula is significant because it suggests Hollywood's reliance on traditional romance narratives to examine and exorcise complicated issues concerning foreign relations. In this type of narrative, the female is most often represented as an alluring, independent free agent eventually "won over" or worn into submission by male wooing. In other words, the conversion plot uses a highly specific "play of gender" where the female character functions as an interpretive cultural construct to illustrate one nation's understanding and desire for another nation's actions.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The conversion plot is addressed in academic texts and essays by Heller, Laville, Robinson, and Strada and Troper.

<sup>32</sup> See Heller, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Dana Heller bases her argument on Diane Elam's study of gender, nation, and the creation of national myth. Elam contends that Hollywood's use of gendered representation makes it impossible to accurately or completely represent another nation or culture in film. Heller, 93.

The conversion plot reached its pinnacle in the late 1930s as Soviet-American relations rapidly deteriorated.<sup>34</sup> During the final year of the decade, 1939, the Soviet Union signed the non-aggression pact with the Nazis leading Britain and France to declare war on Germany. At the same time Soviet forces occupied territories in Western Belorussia and Ukraine, sparking the Winter War against Finland in 1939-1940. In addition, the threat put forth by a growing body of Communist propaganda spawned a growing feeling of apprehension among Americans. Public opinion concerning the Soviet Union quickly polarized and audiences were now open to motion pictures criticizing or questioning contemporary political machinations of the Soviet Union. Russia's questionable image is highlighted in the films *Ninotchka* (MGM, 1939), *Comrade X* (MGM, 1940), and *He Stayed for Breakfast* (Columbia, 1940). Each of these films features a conversion plot where a Soviet character abandons his or her ideals in favor of capitalism.

The defection fairytale provided a safe, working metaphor for Hollywood to address the American public's rapidly expanding mistrust of the Soviet Union. Unlike the so-called "middling" films of the early to mid-1930s this new plot treatment supported both a critical view of Communism and joyous celebration of capitalist values. Motion pictures using this plot device could take a firm stand in the socio-political debate and lobby for a more antagonistic view of Communism. The conversion plot, keen and masterful in design, provides a great ruse for pointing out flaws in communist belief by employing humor, intrigue, and gender-play between the sexes to diffuse and obscure its criticism. This was of supreme importance as some past American pictures screened for international audiences had a reputation for inciting rage among foreign peoples and

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<sup>34</sup> According to Robinson, 1938 and the early part of 1939 marked a period of rapprochement between the U.S. and Russia as the Soviet Union sought refuge from Japanese expansionism and the threat of the Nazis growing power. This changed swiftly when Stalin chose to collaborate with the Nazis to secure the Soviet Union's temporary safety. Robinson, 102.

political officials. Adolf Hitler's reaction to *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Universal Pictures, 1939) is one such example. After an initial film viewing, Hitler became enraged at the film's negative portrayal of the German people, particularly the film's defamation of the courage and honor displayed by German soldiers in World War I. He recruited members of the Nazi party to riot at a Berlin screening and create a disturbance by setting off stink bombs and releasing white mice in the movie theater. According to historian, Ben Urwand, the film, "...argued against almost everything Hitler stood for...", including Hitler's romantic interpretation of the war as a tool for nation-building, comradeship, and character, the positive power of oratory, and its disregard for enemy war propaganda playing a part in the Kaiser's defeat.<sup>35</sup> Studio producers wanted to avoid reactions similar to Hitler's to ensure their films would be successfully screened abroad as well as in the domestic market. This made the conversion plot a boon for studio producers who desired to reflect shifting public perceptions without inciting international disfavor.

Perhaps the most important device employed by the conversion plot to diffuse its anti-communism, pro-capitalism message, is the humorous and sometimes sexist depiction of romance between an American man and Russian woman. This depiction is sexist because it always subjugates the woman to the man's will, maintaining the patriarchal hegemony of American society. As noted by gender and international relations theorist, Emily Rosenberg, the emphasis on gender norms and expectations works within the plot in two ways: first, it links the national (American) to the international (Russian) and second it lends legitimacy to U.S. foreign policy by

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<sup>35</sup> For more on Hitler's perceptions of American film and the *All Quiet on the Western Front* Nazi protest and debacle, see Urwand, 22-27. Urwand points to Hitler's extreme reaction to this film as the beginning of collaboration between Hitler and major studio heads to avoid criticizing the Nazi party by dropping anti-Nazi films and removing Jewish characters from film narratives. Though deeply criticized by the *New Yorker's* David Denby for historical inaccuracies and content omissions, Urwand's book does illustrate the caution exercised by studio heads in the years leading up to WW II. Representatives from Italy, France, Spain, and many other European nations demanded their nations be represented in positive context, avoiding stereotypes and caricatures.

symbolically linking the Russian state to the weaker, female sex and imbuing America with masculine qualities and responsibilities.<sup>36</sup> To validate Rosenberg's argument we will closely examine how gender stereotypes present in Ernst Lubitsch's *Ninotchka* and King Vidor's *Comrade X* serve as metaphors for the political body and nation state. These films may seem innocuous at face value with their big Hollywood stars (Melvyn Douglas, Clark Gable, Hedy Lamarr, and Greta Garbo) and playful "meet cute," but in reality these films mirror a U.S.-centric approach to international politics, where the "red" woman, the symbolic representation of Russia, falls in love with the "white" American and his material charms, thus undermining the sovereignty of her native land<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Rosenberg as cited in Laville, 625.

<sup>37</sup> "Meet cute" is a cinematic term used to describe a plot structure in which a future romantic couple is introduced to one another in an amusing or entertaining manner. In his academic essay, "The big romance or something wild?: Romantic comedy today," film historian Steve Neale points to a first analysis of the "meet cute" by Bygrave who describes the structural technique as "...inventive variations on an old idea—man accidentally bumps into female stranger on the street, knocks over her groceries, helps pick them up, and so on." This was Hollywood's traditional way of getting together so they could fall in love. Neale, 287-289.

### **Ideology of Representation: Red Lovers as the “Other”**

In the autumn of 1939, MGM released *Ninotchka*, a film about a Soviet commissar, Nina Yakushova (played by the magnetic Greta Garbo), whose life is turned upside down when she comes to Paris on official business for the Soviet state. This was the first conversion plot romance produced in Hollywood, and it was generally well-received by audiences, earning a total of \$2.2 million worldwide. Nominated for four Academy Awards including Best Picture, Best Actress, Best Original Story, and Best Screenplay<sup>38</sup>, the film represents the best of Hollywood’s Golden Age. Its quick-witted, satirical approach to Communism versus Capitalism remains fresh even in contemporary times. Upon its release in 1939 filmgoers and film critics alike were quick to note the film’s wry approach to pointing out the fallacies in the Soviet political system. Frank S. Nugent of the New York Times described the film as “...one of the sprightliest comedies of the year, a gay and impertinent and malicious show which never pulls its punch lines (no matter how far below the belt they may land)...”<sup>39</sup> A fellow *Time* critic called the film “...a literate and knowingly directed satire, which lands many a shrewd crack about phony Five Year Plans, collectivist farms, communist jargon, and pseudo-scientific gab.”<sup>40</sup> The *Daily Worker* chimed in with “Garbo does more in one line to debunk Soviet Russia than we have been able to do in a hundred editorials.”

From these reviews it is clear that *Ninotchka* earned a public reputation for presenting a strongly negative view of the Soviet Union. But there is more at work than mere communist bashing in the Billy Wilder, Charles Brackett, and Walter Reisch screenplay. This is the first Russian-genre film where tongue in cheek displays of sex and gender work together to communicate the

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<sup>38</sup> *Ninotchka* did not take home any awards, losing out to David O.Selznick’s *Gone With the Wind*.

<sup>39</sup> Nugent, Frank. "The Screen in Review." *The New York Times*. 10 Nov 1939: 31

<sup>40</sup> From "The New Pictures: Review of *Ninotchka*." *Time*. 6 Nov 1939.



dominance and supremacy of the capitalist system and Western governments. There are several motifs employed by the film that communicate a certain perception or idea about the Soviet Union and its people; these include: (1) the transition of gender roles from masculine to feminine, suggesting that Soviet ideals are primarily stern and sexless but easily softened when faced with the materialist and emotionally free temptations supplied by a capitalist system; (2) the attractiveness of the womanly body, its otherness, and the patriarchal assertion of male dominance over the female form; (3) the use of location to establish an environment where heterosexual relationships, romance, and passions for physical pleasures (for both commodities and emotional connections) might find a place for full expression; and (4) the female consumption of fashion as symbolic of the weakness and corruptibility of the Russian character.<sup>41</sup>

Crucial to the execution of these motifs in *Ninotchka* was the casting of Swedish-born actress, Greta Garbo as the film's titular heroine. The shy and eccentric Garbo was easily recognized by audiences as a visual representation of the "Other." In addition, her turn playing the delicate Russian aristocrat Anna Karenina in two different film versions created a visual dialogue connecting Garbo directly to the Russian people.<sup>42</sup> Garbo was the ideal choice to represent the severity and repression of the Soviet state, particularly when in so many of her previous films she dealt with morose subject matter such as drowning to death, crashing to death, and throwing herself under a train. MGM, although initially reluctant to cast Garbo as *Ninotchka*,<sup>43</sup> capitalized on the alienness off Russian culture and its leading actress in its various promotional campaigns for the film. Echoing the tagline "Garbo Talks!" from the actress's first talking picture *Anna Christie* (MGM, 1930) the

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<sup>41</sup> Dana Heller mentions some of these motifs in her analysis of *Ninotchka* (1939, MGM), particularly the importance of location for establishing a safe zone for a "natural and universal yearning for freedom, pleasure, commodities..." Heller, 94-96.

<sup>42</sup> Rédei, page 52-54.

<sup>43</sup> Louis B. Mayer opposed casting Garbo in an untried comedy role and he was only convinced to allow Garbo to play the role when Paramount agreed to lend Lubitsch to direct the film. See Strada and Troper, 14-15.

tagline for *Ninotchka* read, “Garbo laughs!” applying a new layer of intrigue and mystery to her sullen film persona. MGM also promoted the film by using a dose of sarcasm to address the strangeness and unfamiliarity of Russian names. Another tagline read: ‘Don’t pronounce it – see it!’ directing viewers to engage with the film primarily through the visual, rather than the unknown (i.e., Russian language and cultural references).

If Garbo represented the “Other” through her visual image, then it was Ernst Lubitsch’s (1892-1947) dynamic directing and tailoring of the script that best relayed surface level cultural and ideological conflicts between *Ninotchka*, her fellow countrymen, and her sources of opposition, Count D’Algout (Melvin Douglas) and the former Duchess Swana (Ina Claire). Historian Harlowe Robinson notes that Lubitsch had a fondness for both Russian subjects as a result of his father’s Russian origins and his happy childhood in Berlin, a city located not far from the Polish border and brimming with a vast population of Russians. Additionally, in 1936 prior to receiving the initial script treatment for *Ninotchka*, Lubitsch had taken an extended honeymoon trip to Moscow with his new American bride. He also became an American citizen during the same year. Robinson notes that Lubitsch’s conversations with an old German friend who had recently converted to Communism during his Moscow trip, as well as his own personal experience pledging allegiance to Western democracy helped inform and shape the matrix of the film’s titular character, Nina Ivanovna Yakushova.<sup>44</sup>

Ernst Lubitsch and Louis B. Mayer are the key architects of the film’s development and mixed treatment toward the Soviet Union and communist belief. This is significant because the sexual innuendos, physical and sight gags, and examples of human weakness present in *Ninotchka*

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<sup>44</sup> For more information on script development, the influence of Lubitsch’s personal history on the film’s trajectory, and Mayer’s involvement with the film, see Robinson, 102-111.

are framed primarily from a male perspective, a perspective shared by director and producer. The result is a film coded with messages, references, and examples of sexism specific to an American patriarchal worldview. Both director and producer were ensconced in American society and worked in a field where the appropriate replication of society on screen was critical to a film's success. *Comrade X*, another MGM film produced by Mayer and directed by King Vidor closely followed *Ninotchka* in metaphor and meaning, particularly in its use of the woman to represent the "Other" and consequently, as a metaphor for the Soviet Union. An analysis of both film's narratives, cinematic representation of female characters, props used to convey capitalist temptations, mise-en-scene, and other pertinent production choices is provided in the textual analysis section.

Having discussed the historical background leading to the development of the conversion plot in the film industry, it is also imperative to expand upon the ideological theories forming the basis for comprehending why the Soviet Union was feminized in film and any resulting ramifications. For this purpose, I adopt Bill Nichols' perspective on ideology and film images. Nichols defines the relationship between ideology and film in this manner, "Ideology arises in association with processes of communication and exchange... [it] is how the existing ensemble of social relations represents itself to individuals; it is the image a society gives of itself in order to perpetuate itself...Ideology uses the fabrication of images and the processes of representation to persuade us that how things are is how they ought to be and that the place provided for us is the place we ought to have."<sup>45</sup> Further in his book *Ideology and the Image* Nichols outlines the role of Americans' understanding of human life and cultures in shaping the film narratives and images supplied by Hollywood. He states, "...ideology is the image a society gives of itself in order to

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<sup>45</sup> Nichols, 1-3.

perpetuate itself.”<sup>46</sup> In other words, a nation’s political and cultural beliefs—including attitudes about gender, economy, and patriotism—are replicated in images produced by that country’s people.

This approach to understanding ideology and the image reflects a Gramscian view of the Hollywood film industry, where the ruling class’ beliefs and values become universally dominant and the status quo. The term central to this theory is “cultural hegemony,” first coined by Antonio Gramsci to express his vision of a working class worldview. Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony functions in America’s own self-imagining, particularly in Hollywood film, by creating a narrative of a nation reliant on two premises dominating America’s ruling class: capitalism and patriarchy.<sup>47</sup> Gramscian philosophy also dovetails with cultural theories regarding nation-building and the reliance on the romantic narrative to shape America’s identity. According to American literary theorist Richard Chase, “...the USA has worked out its destiny and defined itself by incorporating an element of romance [in stories of national histories and destinies].”<sup>48</sup> Chase is referring to American authors’ reliance on narratives where American cultural extremes are brought to heel or resolved by passionate love. Examples include literary explorations of both the idyllic and demonic in Puritan melodramas and tales of alienation and disorder based in America’s unvanquished frontier.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>47</sup> Italian Marxist theoretician and politician, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) created his theory of cultural hegemony to illustrate how cultural institutions (i.e., organizations held in place by the ruling class) help maintain and legitimize a shared view of the world in capitalist society. ‘Hegemony’ can best be understood as the success of the dominant class in presenting their singular definition of reality, one that serves their own interests, as the only *sensible* way of viewing the world. This thought is then somewhat blindly accepted by lower classes as ‘common sense.’ Gramsci also postulates that there is not any single sense of a dominant class in society, but shifting alliances of different social classes. This creates tensions between dominate and subordinate classes fighting for the adoption of their worldview. As such, cultural views can align and realign or shift over time. This is pertinent to our discussion of women’s images as represented in society and in motion pictures. Society has positioned the female sex as help mate, lover, sister, mother, and whore, often according to the role society needs them to fit. We see this evidenced in the depiction of the Soviet woman as lover and mother in the films from 1933-1945. For more on Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony see Storey, 216-220.

<sup>48</sup> Chase, viii.

As illustrated by Dana Heller in her analysis of Soviet-American romance films, both a Chasean and Gramscian view are necessary to understand how conversion plot films and gendering the Russian nation as female contributed to America's myth of nation.<sup>49</sup> During the 1930s, Soviet ideology was presented as a danger and threat to the foundation of American society. Communism, with its principles of communal work, shared profits, and desire for global domination, undermined the capitalist system and America's isolationist world view. Thus, films produced during this period needed to define the Soviet Union as "Other," establish a sense of threat to social order and finally confirm the "right" way of thinking for audiences by establishing the capitalist system as superior to communist politics in every way and circumstance.

To lend legitimacy to this message, Hollywood film often used the "fictive" –an imagined sense of identity—to create a "...conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by the other."<sup>50</sup> For Bill Nichols, employing the "fictive" to support ideological views and create vivid visual metaphors is supremely important. He states, "Imaginary here does not mean *unreal*, existing only in the imagination, but rather pertains to views, images, fictions, or representations that contribute to the sense of who we are and to our everyday engagement with the world around us."<sup>51</sup> This strategy is best demonstrated by the conversion plot, where the Soviet woman functions as a threat to the American male's vision of gender norms, at least until she is won over. Heller offers a framework for understanding the role of the woman in representing the Soviet Union. She states, "In the iconography of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, U.S. popular culture, the other has long been powerfully represented by a potentially contaminating Soviet empire over which is mapped the equally

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<sup>49</sup> Heller, 92-95.

<sup>50</sup> Huyssen, 1986: viii as referenced in Heller

<sup>51</sup> Nichols, 3.

contaminating but ultimately susceptible figure of a woman.”<sup>52</sup> Heller is alluding to the Soviet Union’s positioning in film narratives as dangerously feminine, an alluring and simultaneously opposing force to masculine America.

In the textual analysis of Russian genre romances, particularly the conversion plot of late 1930s Hollywood, the reading of women as cultural signs of the “Other” is intriguing. Simone de Beauvoir was the first to examine the image of woman as a “second sex,” or “Other,” in her treaty on the myth of woman. Reframing ideas founded in existentialist theory, Beauvoir suggests that the Self is primarily constructed with reference to what it *is not*. In patriarchal society, Man defines himself as the supreme “Subject” thus confirming the woman as “Other” in the process. Beauvoir states, “She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – She is the Other.”<sup>53</sup>

Beauvoir’s theory is reflected in Russian genre romances by the gendering of the two opposing nations: the Soviet is represented as female and the U.S. as male. In this scenario, the Soviet female is always represented as an outsider—her appearance (often mannish), political beliefs (Communism), mannerisms (stoic and void of emotion), and interactions with the opposite sex (passionless and transactional) do not fit into American cultural expectations for the female gender. Because she fails to fit the idealized image of American womanhood, she is identified by audiences as an immediate threat to the status quo. She is much more than a romantic interest: she is a force to be feared, managed, and finally “converted” by the masculine character, America. Presenting the Soviet woman in this context allowed Hollywood to reflect and encapsulate America’s ambivalent

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<sup>52</sup> Heller, 93.

<sup>53</sup> Beauvoir, 5.

Soviet foreign policy in the 1930s, confirm its tipping point from neutral to angst-ridden and reassure audiences that Capitalism was the correct economic system and worldview.

For the purposes of this work, it is also intriguing to further examine the use of the female's physical body, not just her character and actions, as metaphor and symbol of the Soviet people. As noted by Heller, the cinematic Soviet woman represents both a force of seduction and subjugation. But how were these two opposing forces joined together in one character? To answer this query I turn to Laura Mulvey's essay, "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema." In a sense, Mulvey's argument is an extension of Beauvoir's theory of woman as the "Other." Employing psychoanalytic analysis as a "political weapon," specifically the scopophilic subject found in Freud's child gaze theory and Lacan's infant mirror stage,<sup>54</sup> Mulvey argues that the cinematic apparatus of Hollywood places the audience in a masculine subject position, creating a gender bias through the simple act of spectatorship. This reveals the unconscious patriarchal gendering of the image, as with man as the "looker" and woman as the "object" of the looking, thus placing the woman in a subordinate role to many holders of the gaze, including the male character directing his eyes toward her on screen, the film-making apparatus capturing the image, and the film audience as spectators. Mulvey states, "Unchallenged, mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order...the pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female."<sup>55</sup> Chief to Mulvey's argument is the idea that the spectator gains great enjoyment from indulging in image viewing, and the greatest gratification comes from observing the female body. Because male viewing is "active and curious," the male gaze transforms the female into an object of sexual

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<sup>54</sup> Mulvey encapsulates Freud's theory by noting that the child has a strong desire to control an object through his or her gaze. Also, Lacan's "stade du miroir" is a theory based on a child's recognition of his or herself in a mirror or other reflective surface that allows apperception, or viewing oneself as an object. See McCabe, 29-30.

<sup>55</sup> See Mulvey, 8-11.

fantasy. This is significant, because gender coding through the image reinforces physical and social inequalities between men and women.

Mulvey also argues that Hollywood female film stars were coded with a “to-be-looked-at-ness” and the camera and viewers functioned as the “bearer of the look.”<sup>56</sup> The audience functions as the “bearer of the look” because they gain a narcissistic pleasure from identifying with the film’s protagonist, placing themselves in the shoes of the film’s hero. Mulvey then applies an element of Freudian psychoanalysis to her theory, that women’s visual powerlessness is likened to a male castration wound. Therefore, from Mulvey’s perspective, the female body exists for the pleasure of the male gaze, but also represents a threat due to the lack of a phallus. Linking Mulvey’s theory to the notion of the conversion plot, the Hollywood romance and the role of the Soviet woman, it is easy to see how the female corporeal form could establish a visual sense of intrigue and imminent threat.

While Mulvey’s article has been contested by many film theorists,<sup>57</sup> her theoretical viewpoint can be directly applied to female representation in late 1930s conversion plot films such as *Ninotchka* and *Comrade X*. Lavish attention is paid to the female figure in both these films supporting Mulvey’s theory of visual pleasure derived from gazing at the female form. The camera frequently focuses on the body’s curves and lavishly lingers over darkened eyes, plump lips, and clean lines of a bare collarbone, especially after the Soviet woman has softened her views on Capitalism. Take for example Greta Garbo’s transformation from the cerebral Nina to the hedonistic

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 13-14.

<sup>57</sup> In the mid-1980s Laura Mulvey’s essay was criticized by many film theorists. Critics argued that Mulvey’s essay failed to take into account the possibility of women audience member’s enjoyment of classic Hollywood cinema and condemned her theory for not adhering to normative lines of gender. Mulvey responded to these accusations with her next theoretical piece “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual and Narrative’ Cinema.” Here she argues that women may oscillate between a male and female-coded analytic viewing position using King Vidor’s *Duel in the Sun* to bolster her argument. See McCabe, 33-36.



Ninotchka. As Nina, she arrives on screen business-like in a simple frock consisting of khaki suiting, no frills hat, and sturdy shoes. When Nina is mannish and stoic, the camera remains alienated from her physique, incorporating distance between the actress and the camera via a series of establishing shots, long shots, and eye-level shots. As Nina warms to love and laughter and blossoms into Ninotchka, she dons a smart, stylish hat and later a garment in the style of a confectionary, pink crinoline overlaid with Swarovski crystals. Now the camera is invited closer and a deep focus, extreme close up technique is used to introduce Nina's desirability to the audience. Coming full circle, Mulvey's theory about female representation in classic Hollywood cinema supports Heller's argument that the Soviet woman is both "alluring and dangerous" generating a sense of uneasiness that is mapped onto the Soviet body politic. Heller suggests that this type of depiction only reinforces and intensifies the hegemonic order:

The contradictory result is an eroticization and demonization of the masses, as the chaotic potential of an unleashed sexuality is projected onto the spectacle of an unruly Russian mob...Huyssen writes, 'In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a specific traditional male image of woman served as a receptacle for all kinds of projections, displaced fears, and anxieties (both personal and political) which were brought about by modernization and the new social conflicts as well as by specific historical events...which...threatened the liberal order.' The Russian revolution was precisely such an event, one that generated countless images of hysterical mobs whose overwhelming and frightening passion and irrationality was highly suggestive of the feminine.<sup>58</sup>

Here, Heller employs Huyssen's treatise on the feminine image to examine the function of the Soviet woman as a visual threat. According to Heller and Huyssen, male fear of woman's uncontrollable nature, wild sexuality, and shifting attitudes is symbiotic to bourgeoisie fear of the masses. And so, using the image of woman to represent the attitudes, actions, and group

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<sup>58</sup> Heller applies Huyssen's crowd theory as well as Gustave Le Bon's work to connect the image of female hysteria to the unruly mob, a metaphor also contained in Hollywood Russian genre cinema. Heller, 10.

mentality of the Soviet people is a “...powerful symbolic threat to the patriarchal individualism underwriting the U.S. national identity...”<sup>59</sup>

In the conversion plot, the Soviet woman, or “lover,” represents all that is wrong with the Soviet Union until she is redeemed by romance leading to her individual pleasure and personal freedom. Her transition provides discourses of American/male responsibility and domestic foreign policy are edified. Of course, this type of representation relies heavily on stereotypes about the Soviet Union and the female gender *created* by the United States to support its personal myth of nation. In my textual analysis of the conversion plot films *Ninotchka* and *Comrade-X*, I will examine how Hollywood engineered the Soviet female “lover” to mirror America’s own insecurities and provide a working metaphor for the dehumanization of Communism and marginalization of the Soviet state.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 11.

### **Textual Analysis: Soviet Lovers and the Conversion Plot**

The central roles in *Ninotchka* and *Comrade X*, are Soviet female characters who initially reject any form of femininity, including personal pleasure or romance. This is significant because Ninotchka and Theodore (of *Comrade X*) are symbolic representatives of the Soviet nation's political and cultural mores. Removing their femininity and coding their character with masculine features suggest the American people's impressions of the Soviet as a robotic, unconventional gender position. It also supplies a working metaphor for the romance narrative that defines the conversion plot: the Soviet woman represents the repression of political freedoms and human urges in her native country while the American male represents the commercial freedom, sexual liberation, romance, and potency of the United States.

Key to conveying the ideological opposition between the United States and Soviet Union, including the overarching anti-communist message, is the careful gendering of the Soviet state. In her dissertation on women's images in Hollywood's Russian genre films, Raisa Sidenova argues that pre-WWII Hollywood films present Russia as solely a masculine entity. She states, "Thus for most Americans, pre-war Russia was as masculine on the whole as its citizens were individually (even its women). In general, the aggressiveness of Russian foreign policy, its totalitarianism, and its leader's toughness all contributed to the creation of a masculine image for the country in the West." Sidenova proposes that this male depiction of the Soviet Union in Hollywood film eventually evolved to a more maternal, feminine image in the films created during World War II as propaganda films. My analysis contrasts with her viewpoint for I believe Hollywood consistently gendered the Soviet Union as feminine, depicting her first as a "bad" (read: masculine-acting thus improper) and corrupt female in desperate need of reformation and conversion. Later in WWII films, the Soviet woman was

rendered as a mother or other familial figure such as daughter or sister in need of salvation. In each instance, the U.S. played the masculine role, shaping Russia's destiny according to America's projected will and desired outcome.

In *Ninotchka*, the screwball comedy in which a severe Soviet commissar Nina Ivanova Yakushova is deployed to Paris to expedite the sale of jewels formerly belonging to the Romanov family, communist beliefs are ridiculed and caricatured via the play of gender and nation. As noted by Harlow Robinson, Lubitsch employs humor as the great equalizer in the film, providing a warm avenue for Nina Yakushova to evolve from her critical, repressed ideological self to a more human, more feminine character.<sup>60</sup> The film introduces the subject of gender in its opening sequence, located in a train station where three Soviet emissaries, Buljanoff, Iranoff, and Kopalski, await the arrival of Nina Yakushova (Greta Garbo). Nina, a high-ranking female communist officer, has been dispatched to Paris to mend the mistakes of Buljanoff, Iranoff, and Kopalski, who are unaware that the Commissar is a "lady comrade."

The first person they identify at the train station as a potential comrade turns out to be a steely-eyed, stone-faced German Nazi. He greets his escort with a "Heil Hitler!" and the three emissaries return to their guessing game. When they locate Nina, their response immediately zeroes in on her gender. Coached in the pleasantries of Western society, Iranoff states, "What a charming idea for Moscow to surprise us with a lady comrade!" Kopalski follows up with, "If we had known, we would have greeted you with flowers." In a sly turn of wit Nina responds in a dour, dry tone, "Don't make an issues of my womanhood!" But her womanhood is precisely the focus in this opening scene and an overarching theme of the film. After greeting her comrades, Nina dismisses a porter from carrying her bags, stating it's a social injustice. Her

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<sup>60</sup> Robinson, 108-109.

acerbic comment holds double meaning calling out the clash between capitalist and communist treatment of the working class as well as hinting at gender inequality. Nina knows she is as strong and capable of carrying her bags as any man.

The beginning of *Ninotchka* is filled with visual cues and scripted conversation to convince the audience that Nina is anything but a traditional woman. Her masculine, dreary demeanor is heightened by her aforementioned simplistic uniform (i.e., khaki suit, dreary rain hat, and sturdy shoes). Her view of the world is ensconced in communist rigor and she advocates for her country even if its actions are inhumane. When discussing the politics of her country she states, “The last mass trials were a success. There are going to be fewer but better Russians.” Hints of her physical strength are pronounced early on. She wants to carry her suitcase for herself at the train platform and later in the evening, as she tours the city of Paris, she walks the height of the Eiffel Tower without losing her step or breath (for a point of comparison, the film reports the total number of steps as 829 steps on the spiral staircase and an additional 254 steps to the very top). In a humorous twist, Nina arrives at the top of the tower by foot before her male companion, Count Leon D’Algout, comes to the top via elevator. Upon opening the door to see Nina perched on the outlook, Leon is nearly bowled over with equal parts exasperation and admiration. Nina is also grossly interested in education and dismissive of romantic love. Her resistance to pleasure and commitment to pragmatism is also exemplified in the first encounter between Nina and Leon, Western playboy and gigolo to the Duchess Swana, former owner of the crown jewels. Nina and Leon “meet cute” as Nina stands

on the street searching a map for the exact location of the Eiffel Tower. After a brief introduction, Nina begins her query on the location and the merits of the Eiffel tower:<sup>61</sup>

**Nina Yakushova:** I am interested in the Eiffel tower from a technical standpoint.

**Count Leon:** Technical... I couldn't help you from that angle. You see, a real Parisian only goes to the top of the tower in moments of despair to jump off.

**Nina Yakushova:** How long does it take a man to land?

**Count Leon:** Now isn't that too bad! The last time I jumped I forgot to clock it! (looks at map) Let me see...Eiffel Tower...your finger please.

He takes her finger at points to the map with it.

**Nina Yakushova:** (skeptically) Why do you need my finger?

**Count Leon:** Bad manners to point with your own...Here...the Eiffel Tower...

**Nina Yakushova:** And where are we?

**Count Leon:** (shifting her finger back to the hotel) Here...here we are...and here you are and here am I...feel it?

**Nina Yakushova:** I am interested in only the shortest distance between these two points. Must you flirt?

**Count Leon:** I don't have to but I find it natural.

**Nina Yakushova:** Suppress it.

**Count Leon:** I'll try.

Despite her preoccupation with technological feats (she notes the exact dimensions of the Eiffel Tower and asks to be taken on tours of Parisian factories, not the more famous haberdasheries and perfumeries) in lieu of romance, Nina comes across as a sexually-liberated creature. She agrees to accompany Leon to his little Parisian bungalow with minimal wooing. Her behavior is far from Hollywood's definition of a "good" woman who is chaste and virtuous in all circumstances. In fact, Nina's behavior suggests that Soviet women have a sexual freedom equal to that of American men.

Let us examine a scene where Nina truly establishes herself as the aforementioned "Other" (i.e., an equal threat to capitalist values and patriarchal gender norms), through both her negative view of Parisian labor practices and sexually aggressive advances toward Leon<sup>62</sup>:

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<sup>61</sup> Lines of script are copied directly from the original screenplay. Brackett, et al.  
<<http://www.imsdb.com/scripts/Ninotchka.html>>

...Ninotchka and Leon enter. Ninotchka, during the following scene, is studying every detail of the apartment with the eye of a technical expert.

**Leon:** Good evening, Gaston.

**Gaston:** Good evening, Monsieur.

**Ninotchka:** Is this what you call the “butler”?

**Leon:** Yes.

**Ninotchka:** (takes Gaston’s hand) Good evening, comrade. (to Leon) This man is horribly old. You should not make him work.

**Leon:** He takes good care of that.

**Ninotchka:** He looks sad. Do you whip him?

**Leon:** No the mere thought makes my mouth water.

**Ninotchka:** (to the completely flabbergasted Gaston) The day will come when you will be free. Go to bed little father, we want to be alone.

Following this bit of dialogue, Nina and Leon enter his living room. Ensnared in his cozy parlor they have a frank conversation about the act of romancing. Nina comments on Leon’s features in a decidedly non-sentimental way, praising the clearness of the white of his eyes and his “excellent” cornea. Soon we discover Nina believes love isn’t really an emotion but a “...most ordinary, or shall we say chemical process.” When Count Leon kisses her but a few moments later, Nina reacts in a fashion easily attributed to a chemical rush of hormones—she lean backs and murmurs “Again!” with a sultry purr. Leon, now smitten, has disagreed with Nina’s analysis of romance, citing that love is not a chemical process but a thing mankind cannot live without: a life-affirming emotion that has the power to make doves coo and flowers open their petals. Nina soon witnesses how liberating Leon’s way of life can be. Much of the remaining Paris scenes involve Nina transformation from communist worker to bourgeois enthusiast. She breaks through her dour exterior to laugh in a diner with Leon, trades her khaki uniform for an

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<sup>62</sup> Lines of script are copied directly from the original screenplay. Brackett, et al.  
<<http://www.imsdb.com/scripts/Ninotchka.html>>

extravagant, silly hat (a true marker of her change in attitudes),<sup>63</sup> and joins him for a romantic evening of drinking champagne, dining on rich Parisian delicacies, and rubbing elbows with the bourgeoisie. She is now Ninotchka (an endearing nickname, ironically incorrectly pronounced by the film<sup>64</sup>).

Later in the film, the newly converted Ninotchka is tricked by the jealous Duchess Swana into leaving Paris and abandoning Count Leon for a fair price on the jewels she was originally sent to retrieve. Ninotchka loves Leon but knows the money from the sale of the jewels will save her fellow countrymen from starvation as a result of crop failure. She acquiesces and takes an evening plane to Russia, standing up Leon's dinner plans. Back in Russia, the lavish life of Paris is compared to the stark realities of communist Russia. Ninotchka's fancy silk undergarments and designer hat are tucked away. When Ninotchka describes the hat to a friend, she confesses, "I'd be ashamed to wear it here." She turns on the radio to find music but only hears anti-capitalist propaganda blaring from the speakers. A love letter she receives from Leon is crossed out and stamped "Censored." Again, the film is working to show us that a patriarchal, capitalistic society embraces certain innate personal freedoms while the Soviet seeks to stamp them out. Additionally, Ninotchka's access to material possessions in the free

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<sup>63</sup> Harlowe Robinson cites a famous interview with Billy Wilder in the *Cahiers du Cinema* to explain the importance of the hat as metaphor. As cited by Robinson, Wilder states, "We worked weeks wondering how we could show that Garbo was becoming bourgeois – that she was starting to become interested in capitalist things. We wrote a bunch of different things, then one day Lubitsch said, "We're going to do a scene with a hat....Later, finally, she chases the three commissars out, closes the door, opens her package, takes the hat out, puts it on and looks in the mirror. That's pure Lubitsch—total simplicity." Robinson, 107.

<sup>64</sup> The proper Russian pronunciation of Ninotchka is NEEN-och-ka, not Nee-NOTCH-ka as Greta Garbo's character is called in the film.



world (silk underwear and fancy hats) and her denial of them in Russia directly connects the Western-view of femininity with the act of consumption.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, the undesirable conditions of Russia—its aggressive foreign policy, its repression of basic human urges, its totalitarianism and elimination of free thought—are linked to Ninotchka's words, behaviors, and her physical body. Count Leon, then, represents the free world and capitalist thought.<sup>66</sup> Despite his initial fear of Ninotchka he is attracted to her and seeks to change her to fit his own will and needs, exemplifying Heller's argument regarding Hollywood film's role in building myths of nationhood for the American people. The film's two main characters—Ninotchka representing Russia and Leon representing the West, or more appropriately, America—link the private body to the national body in an effort to fulfill America's own national ideal. In other words, Ninotchka is a metaphor for America's desire to control Russia by chiding away her undesirable qualities in an attempt to correct her path. The plot is only resolved when Leon arranges for Ninotchka to join him in Constantinople completing her defection. To seal the deal Leon states, "They wouldn't let me in, so I had to get you out."

Arriving on the heels of *Ninotchka*, MGM's second anti-communist comedy, *Comrade X* (directed by the American-born King Vidor), made its big screen debut in late 1940 at the tipping point of American apprehension toward Soviet foreign policy. While the U.S. maintained its isolationist position to avoid getting its hands dirty dealing with mounting Nazi aggression, the Soviet Union had become close bedfellows with the Nazi party and its fascist

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<sup>65</sup> For an excellent analysis of the Russian woman's defection through discovery of romance through consumption, refer to "Our Country Endangered by Underwear." Laville, 625-627.

<sup>66</sup> It is important to remember that in the script and film, Leon's character is a deposed member of the Russian aristocracy, similar to Swana. However, his joie de vivre, suave attitude, and fiscally liberal ways made it easy for American audiences to identify him as a capitalist symbol.

leader. Stalin, in an effort to protect his country from impending invasion, entered into a non-aggression pact with Hitler's German faction in the late evening hours of August 23, 1939. This agreement, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, further damaged perceptions of communist ideology and the Soviet state among the American public. Most citizens were no longer willing to give Stalin and the Soviet people the benefit of the doubt.<sup>67</sup>

America's new stance toward the Soviet Union was directly reflected in the acerbic, yet playful, attacks on Communism in *Comrade X*. Where *Ninotchka* handled the communist vs. capitalist debate with a velvet touch, *Comrade X* repeats its criticism in a more direct, articulate manner. The storyline even follows the same narrative arc as *Ninotchka*: McKinley Thompson, a red-blooded American newspaper man with a "love 'em and leave 'em" attitude (played by Clark Gable just off the roaring success of Selznick's *Gone with the Wind*) works in Moscow covering the Soviet beat. Dissatisfied with a lack of personal freedoms in a totalitarian society, particularly the ability to say, think, and behave as one feels, Mac composes and distributes highly critical articles of the Soviet political system to an international audience. To obscure his identity he employs the pen name "Comrade X" and carries a radio that doubles as a camera. When his cover is blown by his man in waiting, Vanya (Felix Bressart, fresh from his role as emissary in *Ninotchka*), Mac is in jeopardy of being deported or sent to prison. The simpleminded Vanya has other plans, threatening to release Mac's identity to the public if he does not get his beloved daughter, Theodore (played by Austrian sexpot Hedy Lamarr), out of the country.

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<sup>67</sup> Levering includes a series of Gallup polls and a brief synopsis of American reaction to Soviet developments in his study (35). He states, "The Soviet Union, which had enraged Americans by outlawing religion and private property, had now plunged Europe into war by signing on Hitler's dotted line, joined with him in plundering eastern Europe, and even preceded him in extending the war to Scandinavia."

For the purposes of this analysis, we will direct our attention to Theodore, a stern lady comrade who is so loyal to communist ideology that she is willing to risk annihilation at the Kremlin for her Marxist beliefs. This plot pretext is but one of the many pointed barbs the film hurls at the communist party, highlighting the party's willingness to slaughter and betray both commoners and political officials whose ideological beliefs challenged the status quo.<sup>68</sup> The film's criticism of this treatment of the Russian people is best illustrated when Theodore's father, Vanya, states to newspaper man Mac Thompson, "The Communists have ideas but they found you can't have a government with everyone running around with ideas. So what is happening? The Communists are being executed so that Communism will succeed." Other criticisms lobbed at the Soviet people include picturing the Russians as overly emotional, easily manipulated, suspicious, and double-crossing. The workforce, including Mac's secretary, Olga, and a hotel bellhop are supreme examples of the film's negative stereotyping.

In a scene featuring Mac and Olga, Mac, hoping to log in some quality writing time as Comrade X, must distract his overbearing secretary. His method is booze. In a charming manner, he removes Olga's glasses "to get a better look" at her beauty. She obliges but becomes skeptical when Mac pours her an alcoholic beverage much larger than his own. She suggests they switch glasses and Mac says, "I've never meet a Russian yet who wasn't suspicious. It's pathetic!" Olga then downs her beverage. Inebriated, she waxes nostalgic for the Russian land proclaiming, "I love Americans the best...but Russia is better. And why you

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<sup>68</sup> This part of the film alludes to Stalin's Great Purge which shifted from expelling 400,000 citizens from the land in 1933 to arresting, imprisoning, and executing them from 1936 onward. Rumors of these trials and accounts from U.S. news journalists and writers began to reflect the tragedy of these trials. Freda Utley, American scholar, political activist, and former supporter of the communist party, stated in her book *The Dream We Lost...*, 'Nazi Germany appears rather less horrible as observed from the democratic states of western Europe and America. The very fact that so many Germans and German Jews have been allowed to leave the country and tell about it, instead of being shot or immured for life in concentration camps, proves the comparative mildness of the Nazi regime.' As quoted in Levering, 37.

ask? Because Russia has a soul. It is suffering and beauty.” She then begins to weep dramatically before breaking into a Russian folk song. Likewise, the interaction between Mac and the hotel valet highlights the film’s skepticism and harsh criticism of the Soviet people. In this scene, Mac’s female reporter sidekick (a wise-cracking Eve Arden) is detailing her morning events when the valet enters the room with a few morning “pick me ups” (i.e., two large bottles of whiskey). She says, “Hey, you really missed something at the Kremlin this morning, Mac...Full of stuffed-shirts, double-crossing the masses. Someday the people are going to get wise and take it apart brick by brick.” Overhearing the conversation, the butler demands 230 rubles for the bottles, which in actuality only costs about 15 rubles per bottle. Mac accuses him of overcharging, and he responds, “That’s for me so I am not telling the secret police how the lady talked about the Kremlin.”

Back to the film’s leading lady, Theodore. Many similarities exist between Ninotchka and Theodore. Similar to her predecessor, Theodore is an untraditional woman, mannish and gruff at first blush. In her first encounter with Mac, she proudly announces she’s been given a man’s name by the Workers’ Council so she can perform a man’s occupation as streetcar driver. He replies, “You don’t look like a Theodore to me! Somebody didn’t have his glasses on.” But her stoic expression, lack of makeup, and buttoned-up appearance in a motorman uniform and hard-brimmed hat contradict Mac’s proclamation. He may see her feminine underpinnings, but to the viewer she is predominately masculine. Aside from the evidence supplied by her appearance, Theodore also displays great feats of physical strength. She energetically walks seven miles back to Moscow after dropping her streetcar at its final post. She is also full of ideals, reciting an entire academic text on the subject of overproduction to Mac as a point of casual conversation. From these examples, it is clear to see that Theodore echoes the same

traits as Ninotchka. She even adopts a similar stance on love, viewing marriage as purely transactional, much like a business deal. She only agrees to marry Mac so she can go to America to start a revolution and save the masses from “hot dogs and boogie woogie.” At the marriage bureau, she describes the post-card marriage in highly clinical terms, “You do not understand, Comrade when you get married, you are given a postal card. When you send post-card back, marriage is over.” For Theodore, romance is a transaction only and love is a “failure of the mind.”

But Theodore is not immutable. Soon Mac, a supreme example of the American spirit and male patriarchal view, begins transforming her ideals. It should be noted that Mac is a much more obvious representative of the American state, than the capitalist-enthusiast Leon. Mac is a red-blooded American through and through, with an unabashed love for America’s great pastimes of free speech, baseball, and dancing. Mac, like Leon, uses reverse psychology on Theodore to lure her to the West. He promises to help her lead a revolution in America by distributing communist propaganda to set the people free from their materialistic oppression. But we know this is not his real objective. Mac encourages Theodore to embrace the capitalist system by applauding her feminine expression and presenting her with delicate feminine accessories. After all, according to Mac she will be able to spread communist propaganda much more successfully if she is beautiful and charming. Mac continues his campaign for Theodore’s embrace of her femininity on their wedding night. Tucked away in Mac’s hotel room, Theodore emerges from the bathroom wearing a woolen, shapeless nightgown the size of a parachute. Mac looks at her with much disapproval. He says, “You’ve got work to do and it’s important that you start out right. Charm, beauty, appeal! That’s the way you are going to spread Communism in the new world. We both agreed on it. Now here put this on,” and hands her a

silken, lace-embellished negligee. She puts the gown on and with a slight smile of approval states, "It's a little on the reactionary side. I'm a little confused but glad you like it." Thus, the stage is set for Theodore's conversion as she softens to the lures of Western materialism and romance. The rest of *Comrade X*'s plot is filled with screwball antics as Mac, Theodore, and Vanya are thrown into prison after Mac's identity is discovered, escape, and evade the Soviet army by escaping across the Romanian border in an extended chase scene. The conclusion of the film shows the trio nestled among the American people in a stadium at a Brooklyn Dodgers game. Theodore, dressed in a smart white dress suit with an angled hat embellished with jewels punctuated by diamond earrings dangling from her lobes, screams with passion, "It's a home run. Come on Brooklyn...The Dodgers are murdering the Reds!" This final scene illustrates the transformation of Theodore in a deliciously complete way. Her coiffed appearance and enthusiasm for capitalist sport now fits with American standards of beauty and ideology.

These two films, *Ninotchka* and *Comrade-X* offer interesting examples of how Hollywood coded gender with ideals of the American national body. Through the featured leading ladies, we are presented with a view of the Soviet Union that parallels the American public's negative perceptions of communist ideology, its fear of dangerous political motivations at the hands of its mercurial leader, Stalin, and unspoken desires of the public and perhaps the government to gain dominance over the Russian people and convert them to America's ideological practices. Many metaphors (Paris and the Brooklyn Dodgers as representations of the West, capitalist society, and the nation of boogie woogie), symbols (feminine accessories and undergarments), and even dialogue are used to convey these ideas in a digestible manner that is as coy as it is

convincing. But this image of the Soviet as an object of desire for conversion purposes was about to transform yet again to fulfill a new national ideal: comradeship as allies in WWII.

### **Comrades, Yes?: The U.S./Soviet Alliance (1941-1945)**

My analysis of representations of the Soviet Union in Hollywood film and its feminine coding would not be complete without a review of wartime productions. Perhaps the most interesting period of Soviet representation, the years of wartime partnership between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. from 1941-1945 produced some of the most equally heart-wrenching and nonsensical narratives about the Russian people as Hollywood scrambled to unravel its previous negativity and cynicism toward Communism and Stalin. This transition was set into play by Germany's unanticipated invasion of Russia in late June of 1941. The operation, named "Fall Barbarossa," began along the outskirts of the Eastern Front, entering through the rolling hillsides of Ukraine and Baltic territories and nearly decimated the quaint, agrarian villages couched within the region. Stalin received several warnings about the oncoming invasion but was left dizzied and confounded by the surprise German onslaught. The attack violated the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and set Stalin running to the arms of the Allies seeking refuge in the face of devastation.

Roosevelt, still ensconced in an isolationist approach to world politics, did not deny the Soviet Union aid but instead viewed this turn of events with a progressive eye. Roosevelt had a knack for locating the good in any situation and believed partnership with the Soviet Union stood a chance to both reduce German power and help secure victory for the Allies. He also foresaw partnership with the U.S.S.R. and the Generalissimo Stalin as paving a way to a potential post-war peace plan and the eventual global spread of democracy. This optimistic viewpoint resulted in Roosevelt's welcoming of an Anglo-Soviet combination against Germany and his signing over a portion of Lend-Lease funds to support the Red Army. But it would not be long before the U.S. became strange bedfellows with the Soviets. After a series of ambiguous interactions with Hitler, a game of cat and mouse of sorts resulting in some naval advances against Germany, the United



States suffered its first homeland attack. But the attack came from Japan rather than Germany as a result of Roosevelt's embargo against supplying Japan with certain war-making supplies and other products, including petroleum, to quell the nation's mounting invasions of Southeast Asia. As counter-measure, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 pushing the United States to declare war on Japan. Germany and Italy, honoring their alliance with Japan, now joined forces against the United States. Likewise, the United States entered the ranks of the allied party with Britain, France, and the Soviet Union.<sup>69</sup>

As noted by Levering, Roosevelt sought to manage the American public's perception of the United States' support and eventual partnership with the Soviet Union by letting the media take the lead in expressing an opinion. Quoting a presidential address to the nation given shortly after Hitler's invasion of the Baltic region, Levering states, "Apart from saying in effect in his press conference on 24 June that another enemy of fascism was always welcome, the president permitted other opinion makers to take the lead in circulating opinions on this issue."<sup>70</sup> Roosevelt's use of the media as the chief tool of managing public perception during the war effort would remain in effect until his death in 1945, just prior to German surrender and the conclusion of the war. One of the chief media partnerships enlisted by Roosevelt was a partnership between the Hollywood studio system and the government's war effort. The significant connection between the studios and the propaganda arm of the government is discussed at length in Clayton Koppes and George Black's book "Hollywood Goes to War." Koppes and Black indicate the supreme role of The United States Office of War Information (OWI) and Hollywood film in solacing a suffering American population and spurring them to victory through the narrative power of motion pictures:

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<sup>69</sup> For a complete view of Roosevelt's foreign policy, including a more detailed timeline of major events in WW II foreign policy, and interactions between Roosevelt, Hitler, and Stalin, see Friedel, pages 25-43.

<sup>70</sup> President Roosevelt political address as quoted by Levering on page 42.

The tide of war began to shift about October or November of 1942...We could feel at last that victory would be ours, perhaps as early as 1944. But the eventual, horrifying costs were already beginning to be sensed. In such an environment, OWI's Bureau of Motion Pictures viewed Hollywood films with mounting frustrations. The very question it had asked the studios to consider– "Will this picture help win the war?"—sounds absurd in retrospect. But in that grim year of 1942 propagandists as well as filmmakers took the question with deep seriousness.<sup>71</sup>

Roosevelt viewed the cinema as a tool, not just as a method of wooing the American public but also as another potential avenue to secure Joseph Stalin's friendship and align the Communist leader's support with his own inspired vision for worldwide democracy and goodness for all humankind.<sup>72</sup> As such, film produced during World War II represented a "great moral crusade" for the United States bearing specific designs in its messaging and implications. Hollywood stood at the forefront of crafting a new relationship between the Soviet nation and the American public. Its intent was to replace the ambivalence and skepticism of *Ninotchka* and *Comrade X* with a new message: the Soviet Union was now friend, not foe.

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<sup>71</sup> For more on the development of the OWI and its role in licensing Hollywood film for the war effort, see Koppes and Black, Chapter 2 "OWI Takes Offense," pages 83-112.

<sup>72</sup> Roosevelt had high hopes for developing a partnership with Stalin during the war alliance years. Lend-lease efforts secured the Soviet's participation in the war and proved vital to defense against Hitler's continued invasion and siege of Leningrad. Roosevelt even traveled to meet Stalin along with Churchill in Tehran in 1943 in an extraordinary effort to sway him over to accommodate the United Nations' aim for peace. See Strada and Troper, 41.

### **Red Mothers on the Silver Screen**

During the war years, many studio heads and directors supported FDR's wartime policies, most notably Warner Brothers, and almost every studio had its wartime picture.<sup>73</sup> But portraying the Soviet Union in the best light proved a difficult challenge. The new recipe for Russophobic film called for portraying Russia and its people as a nation in need of aid and worthy of American sympathies while simultaneously showing disapproval for Communist ideology. To solve this riddle, Hollywood relied on several new tropes including: (1) illustrating Soviet commitment to protecting home, hearth, and family values; (2) romanticizing the traditional folk heritage of the Russian people and emphasizing their peaceful agrarian lifestyle; (3) portraying the bravery of the people and leadership they display in fighting against the German enemy. As Strada and Troper explain, the subtext of these films imply, "...that Russians are brave people dying in defense of their homeland; they come from close-knit families and are romantics who fall deeply in love; they also have good leaders who are dependable allies."<sup>74</sup> Hollywood's aim in these films was not to emphasize the "Otherness" of the Soviet Union as achieved in the middling and critical films of the late 1930s. It was to Americanize the country and create a system of shared values despite our distinct, and still existing, ideological differences.

Again, many Hollywood films employed the Soviet woman to relay its didactic message to the American public. But this time, the gender coding was subverted and reversed. Previous Russophobic features such as *Ninotchka* and *Comrade X* applied gender coding to present females as subversive and mismatched with contemporary social norms. Soviet women were a threat to gain mastery over, convert, and contain. In these new features, women are depicted as soft

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<sup>73</sup> See Robinson, 115-117.

<sup>74</sup> Strada and Troper, 44.

creatures, at first idyllic, passive, and nurturing before standing up as brave and stoic fighters for their country. The differences are charted in the table below:

Film Period	Gender Structuring	End Result
Soviet Recognition, 1933-1940	<p>Soviet woman is mannish, committed to fundamentals, devoted to education and productivity</p> <p><i>Transformation</i></p> <p>→</p> <p>Physically beautiful, romantic, happy and enthralled by material possessions</p>	Hegemonic order is established through converting the “Other” to the coded gender order
World War II Alliance, 1941-1945	<p>Soviet woman is highly committed to community, open to romance and passion, she is perfectly coiffed and softly feminine</p> <p><i>Transformation</i></p> <p>→</p> <p>Becomes a defender of her people, fighting alongside men on the front lines</p>	Hegemonic order is established through presenting the Soviet Woman as equally an object of adoration and an object of social change (i.e., the “woman behind the man with a gun”)

Soviet women in Hollywood cinema, as illustrated by Raisa Sidenova in her work on gender and WW II-era Russophoric cinema<sup>75</sup>, were subject to evolving gender standards imposed by the revision of traditional gender definitions and relations at the behest of the U.S. military and government. Women were called to serve their country by supporting the war cause and taking on new roles, formerly exclusive to men. This included both working in factories on the home front to produce military equipment and weapons, as well as joining the military on the front lines as medical assistants. But women also stood as symbols for nation, land, and the national ideal of the

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<sup>75</sup> See Sidenova, 22-25.

treasured home and hearth. Women, with their ability to preserve community and nurture progeny, were symbols of a national identity and their femininity was praised and applauded. Therefore, the image of the wartime woman represents a union of binary opposites: she must equally signify the weak, defenseless, pacifist to fight for and as well as an independent, self-sufficient, fighter on the backlines of the war. The mixed metaphor supplied by the image of the woman in WW II is best by Higgonnet's double helix theory, which argues that the twisting strands of DNA are an apt metaphor for the structure of gender relations during the 1940s. One strand represents the new positions and responsibilities obtained by women during the war era, while the other represents the reverse of these expectations as women are continuously tied to their role as homemaker and receive less recognition for their advances. The end result is a binding of women to a less equal social status to men both before and after the war.<sup>76</sup>

This idea is also reflected in Furia and Delby's communication study on the gendered representation of women in mainstream military films produced during WW II. Their analysis of women as symbols of nation, land, and national ideals reveals the duplicitous nature of their gender coding on screen:

The WW II era was one of the few periods in American military film history that represented women's involvement in the armed services without questioning their capabilities, while granting them a feminine identity alongside their military identity...this was accomplished through female characters who demonstrated knowledge and skill equal to that of their male counterparts, successfully mastering previously masculine roles and accomplishing tasks traditionally conceived of as needing masculine attributes while at the same time maintaining their femininity through appearance and either reference to or engagement in feminine roles, such as wife, lover, daughter, or mother. This combination of achievement in both traditionally feminine and masculine actions and roles was unique in military film history, due in part to the government's encouragement of women to support the war effort without fear of social sanctions. However, it was also circumscribed.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Higgonnet, 37-39.

<sup>77</sup> Furia and Belby, 218.

Gender structuring of the female sex was not exclusive to films but also present in other war era media materials. Consider the popular icon of Rosie the Riveter, commonly recognized as the artfully manicured, bandana-wearing woman flexing her bicep in J. Howard Miller's 1942 "We Can Do It!" poster, as well as the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps' advertisement with its depiction of a strong, uniformed woman with set brow, framed by the message "This is My War Too!" in bold block letters (view Appendix 2.3.)<sup>78</sup>.

The sexual coding of masculine and feminine qualities of war was ubiquitous in the propaganda images produced by the OWI. It was also alive and present in WW II pro-Russian Hollywood films. In this next section, I will illustrate how the positioning of Russian women as supreme symbols of Mother Russia (nation and land) facilitated a new understanding of the Russian people as the quintessential "damsel in distress," while simultaneously maintaining expectations for gender behavior in culture. The feminization of Russia's image in these films help uplift and secure the masculinity of the U.S. and reinforce its own myth of nation as a sovereign political power with the correct political ideals and motivations.

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<sup>78</sup> Miller's "Rosie the Riveter" is actually a case of mistaken identity. The woman featured in his iconic poster is a nameless heroine. The real "Rosie" was captured by Norman Rockwell in 1943 but failed to become a popular figure perhaps due to her overtly muscle-bound physique.

### **Textual Analysis: Mother Russia and WW II Films**

For the purposes of this analysis, I have narrowed my focus to only include WW II films with the following features: (1) the action of the film is set majorly in the Soviet Union; (2) a Russian-born woman serves as a central character in the plot; (3) this female is first portrayed as a civilian before adopting a part or small role in military activity; and (4) a male figure (usually hailing from America) sparks the female's transformation. A majority of pro-Soviet Hollywood films follow this recipe, including the saccharine musical *North Star* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1943), and the romance-infused features *Days of Glory* (RKO Radio Pictures, 1944) and *Song of Russia* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1944). These films are striking in their similarities when viewed together nearly seventy years after their release. They effectively communicate the new relationship blooming between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. in a heartwarming manner, lionizing the Soviet woman as she fights (sometimes to an unforgiving death) alongside her lover and community. They stand apart from the overtly political machinations of feature films like Warner Brothers' *Mission to Moscow* (1943), which has earned a notorious reputation as the most controversial film about the Soviet Union during the WW II period. A collaboration between former Senator Joseph Davies, Roosevelt, Warner Bros. Studios, and the OWI, this semi-documentary based on Davies' experiences as a diplomat to the Soviet Union. This film whitewash the Soviet Union's political oppression, particularly the show trials prosecuted by Andrei Vyshinsky during Stalin's Reign of Terror, which were directed at Trotsky, Stalin's real world enemy, who he banished and later had assassinated. The film even falsely places the blame for the Japanese and German partnership at the feet of Trotsky as conspirator. Hollywood's overreach also extended to the depiction of Stalin's industrialization of the Soviet Union, minimizing the famine and hardships faced by the kulaks during the collectivization of agriculture. Despite an extensive publicity budget (an original

promotional budget of \$250,000 was raised to \$500,000 a few months later), there was significant public outcry against the film. This criticism is best-summed in a review from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette circa 1943 by film writer Harold V. Cohen. Cohen relays the following warning to readers regarding the film's merits, "That's one of the chief faults of 'Mission to Moscow,' it's insistence that Stalin was able to see every international move coming step by step and that all other great powers were now and then blind to the tempest coming to a boil." Overall, the film aims to decontextualize existing myths of the Soviet Union in popular media, but becomes so heavy-handed in its portrayal of the earnest goodness of the Soviet political system that it reads as false and propagandizing.<sup>79</sup>

But this film does set the ball rolling, so to speak, in Hollywood's evolving depiction of the Soviet people. Whereas Soviet films of the 1930s had employed Eastern European-native actors as Russian characters affecting a German accent, *Mission to Moscow* casts American actors to play Russian working class members and political officials alike. As noted by Harlowe, casting choices were crucial in helping make the propagandist point that "Soviets were just like Americans." Language, too, helped minimize perceptions of cultural differences and in this semi-documentary, English is spoken with absolute clarity and proper diction.<sup>80</sup> We also see the emergence of a new type of Soviet woman outlined by the film. A scene at a cosmetics factory notes the ability of women to fulfill dual roles as socially productive and representations of beauty. Mrs. Litvinov, commissar of the U.S.S.R.'s cosmetics industry and wife of the Soviet Union's foreign diplomat, obliges Mrs. Davies with a tour of the makeup factory. In creating small talk, Mrs. Davies notes she used to run her father's business in America to which Mrs. Litvinov replies, "...We had an impression

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<sup>79</sup> Koppes and Black, 201-209.

<sup>80</sup> Robinson, 120-121.



American women were ornamental, but not useful. And you thought our women were useful but not ornamental.” This remark sets the foundation for the shifting gender structuring of American and Soviet women. They now occupy both an industrial space as employee as well as a domestic space as lover and mother. The idea of women performing a male’s work was often ridiculed in *Ninotchka* and *Comrade X* but to garner female support for the war effort, it was important to applaud and uplift women performing traditional men’s work. Aside from the female-focused cosmetic industry scene, the film provides examples of women working as miners, engineers, and factory workers.

Hollywood’s ideological apparatus failed to hit its stride with this Warner Bros. feature production and a new lesson emerged. The political should be avoided at all costs and swapped for what the American public craved most: a moving love story. What followed was a slew of Russo-American romance narratives that patched over ideological differences and united the U.S. and U.S.S.R. through music, romance, and a major injection of the melodramatic. Unlike *Mission to Moscow*, these films displayed the Soviet Union’s wartime suffering through the eyes and hearts of the fairer sex. The female, standing as representative of Mother Russia, becomes a visual tool for creating empathy among American audiences, reinforcing Germany as the chief enemy of world peace, and actively creating a myth of nation through portraying females within the appropriate ideology of the time (i.e., females are ultimately subject to male desire, as the Soviet Union is subject to the United States’ political motivations and its desire for shared global democracy and peace).

The first film to highlight the sacrifice of the Soviet woman and illustrate young love disfigured by war was Samuel Goldwyn’s 1943 production, *North Star*. Nominated for six Oscars with no official win and named by *Life* magazine as the “movie of the year,” the film was well-

received by the American public and its message of innocuous universality pleased almost everyone except screenwriter, Lillian Hellman, who effectively bought back her contract from Goldwyn after his meddling turned her simple story about the German invasion of the Ukraine into a bloated and overzealous production number. As noted by Strada and Troper, Hellman was later brought to task by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) for the film's pro-Soviet message but refused to name names in an emboldened move.<sup>81</sup> The history behind the production leads us straight to the steps of the White House where Roosevelt advisor Harry Hopkins was encouraged to reach out to Hellman, a popular playwright with sympathies toward the Communist party. Hopkins, FDR's right-hand man<sup>82</sup>, envisioned the film as a documentary with on-the-scene photography revealing the plight of the Soviet peasants fending off famine and the invasion of the Germans. Hellman, excited by this proposition, gathered Hollywood's biggest creative influences—director William Wyler (Academy Award winner for *Mrs. Miniver*) and Gregg Toland (*Citizen Kane's* cinematographer)—to make plans. But plans were waylaid by various delays. When Wyler enlisted in the Army Air Force, Hellman made a go of it on her own by penning a fictive screenplay. Hellman's play was simple in design capturing "...in human terms the heroic resistance of ordinary Russians."<sup>83</sup> But Goldwyn had other plans and transformed the plain script into a lavish production number with a bloated cast of popular, down-to-earth American actors (matinee idols Anne Baxter, Dana Andrews, Walter Brennan, Farley Granger, Ann Harding, Walter Huston, and Dean Jagger) and a bombastic, folksy village celebration scored by Aaron Copland and choreographed by Russian ballet master, David Lichine. Russian-born director Lewis Milestone, famous for his portrayal of strong

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<sup>81</sup> Strada and Troper, 86.

<sup>82</sup> Hopkins was appointed by President Roosevelt to administer the Lend-Lease Program and also served as emissary to Churchill. Many journalists knew him as the "deputy president" although he was never given the official title. See Saul, 387.

<sup>83</sup> Koppes and Black, 209-210.

heroines, moving relationships, and social change, lays on the schmaltz thickly and with no discretion.

Despite the ballyhoo of the film's quaint Russian-peasant costuming, misguided set design of a well-off farming collective, and jubilant singing and dancing more fitted to the likes of musical productions *Stagecoach* or *Oklahoma!*, the film's plot comes across as simplistic. The film begins with a happy celebration at a lush Ukrainian collective farm (an unrealistic depiction in the wake of Stalin's collectivization efforts which ultimately spread famine), a village feast is at hand and the next day the town's fresh-faced recent high school graduates on the cusp of adulthood—Marina, Claudia, Damien, and Koyla—are planning a trip to neighboring Kiev. A warning on the radio of Germany's invasion of Poland and a recent bombing of Poland creates some nervousness, but the village people move on with unloading a supply train and merrymaking at the feast. The next day as the youth walk to Kiev, the worst happens: an air strike rains fiery bombs over top the young people. Germany has invaded the Soviet Union. The remaining film sequences don't avoid showing the casualties of German onslaught, but parade them as examples of the vulnerability of the Soviet people. In demonstration of Stalin's "scorched earth" policy, the peasants of the North Star collective burn their village to the ground while the teens attempt to fight off the Nazi takeover through a series of guerrilla attacks. The film largely pits the dewy innocence of youth against the harshness of war activity. One sequence even shows a young North Star boy dying as a result of the Nazi soldiers collecting his blood to aid injured military men. The film is littered with scenes of dead or fatally injured children, meant to shock the audience with realistic depictions of war fatalities. The idea is clear: the Soviets are ill-equipped to deal with the invading Germans and children are the chief victims of warfare.

There are also lessons to be learned from the film's treatment of women, particularly its emphasis on female suffering. A trio of three women represent different elements of female sacrifice in the film: there is Marina (Anne Baxter), the young daughter and lover, Sophia (Ann Harding), Marina's mother and wife of the village leader, and Clavdia (Jane Withers), a dreamy youth with her head in the clouds who transforms into a guerrilla fighter. Marina and Sophia together represent male support and loyalty in the face of danger and tragedy. Marina dreams of marrying boyfriend Damian during the film's opening celebration. In congratulating Damian on his academic scholarship, she dreams of their future coupling, "...and we'll grow old together. And I'll be a beautiful old woman and very kind. Our grandchildren will love me and you will too, more than ever!" With these words, Marina paints the future for Damian and provides a cause for fighting the Germans. She is a reminder of past and present, a nation built on love and future dreams of progeny.

Marina's friend, Clavdia, and mother, Sophia, represent a more visceral demonstration of suffering. When Sophia is challenged by German officers as to the location of her husband after the village people burn North Star, Sophia refuses to give away his position. In turn she is tortured by the Nazis who break one arm and one leg as punishment for her secrecy. She also witnesses the death of one of her children in a highly dramatic and touching scene. The sequence begins with scenes of domesticity and motherhood. Women are doing housework in one shot quickly followed by a scene featuring a doctor checking on a new mother lying in her hospital bed. Next, we see Sophia glancing out the window to check on her young daughter as she plays with a friend. The camera then cuts to a shot of the sky filled with German bomber planes. The children run, screaming into the distance but Sophia's child is immobilized with fear and killed. The next scene shows Sophia's anguish as she leans over her dead child and covers her face with an apron. As her

husband approaches Sophia adopts a stiff upper lip, highlighting her stoic valor. She has suffered a personal loss but so has her town and the Soviet people. This is emphasized by the mounting chorus of *The International*, the national anthem of the Soviet Union, playing as a soundtrack to the scene.

Finally there is Clavdia, the film's youngest heroine. Determined to overcome her fear and delivering the film's most impassioned speech, Clavdia follows Damian as he crosses the battlefield to bring a German transport headed toward North Star to a halt. Clavdia, willing to sacrifice her life for her Motherland, cries out, "Grandpa, or somebody, help me! Make me do something right the way everybody else does. Keep me from being so frightened, keep me from crying. Please!" as the camera narrows in on her tear-stained face for a tight close-up shot. Clavdia and Damian then press onward to meet their gruesome fate. When the German convey is stopped by the guerrilla soldiers' fire, Clavdia is mortally wounded. Damien is also wounded by a grenade which explodes in such proximity to his face he is rendered blind. The film brings its message to a close by circling back to the character of Marina, seated beside the blinded Damian on a cart as they and a few survivors from the village escape the ruins of North Star. It is Marina who is left to express the film's final moral charge. With a medium close-up panning closer to her and Damian's face as her impassioned reaction to the devastation mounts, she proclaims, "Wars don't leave people as they were. All people will learn this and come to see that wars do not have to be. We will make this the last war. We'll make a free world...the world belongs to us, all people, if we fight for it. And we will fight for it!" In this final scene, the film uplifts Marina, and the image of the Soviet woman, as both fighter and lover. She unites the binary opposites of vulnerability and valor, past and future, suffering and freedom. She also represents the many phases of a woman's life. She is currently a dutiful daughter to her country, village, and family. She is also a lover and future mother of Damian's children. She represents Russia's past, future, and present simultaneously.

There are two additional films sharing a similar narrative trajectory as *North Star* in which a Soviet woman overcomes her fear of warfare, renounces her pacifism, and mounts the opposition alongside a male companion. But whereas *North Star* placed love of country over personal matters of the heart, these next two pictures unite opposing ideologies through romance. First on the docket is *Song of Russia*, Metro's own contribution to OWI and the war effort. Written by two former members of the American Communist Party, Paul Jarrico and Richard Collins, and directed by yet another Russian-born director, the film features another cast of musically-inclined peasants who sing their way from one guerrilla attack to another. *Song of Russia* tells the tale of Nadya (American sweetheart Susan Peters), who hails from the village of Tchaikovskoe. Early in the film, Nadya makes a special trip to see American conductor, John Meredith (Robert Taylor, in his last role before joining the military), who is touring the Soviet Union to better understand what inspired Tchaikovsky to write his treasured sixth symphony. Nadya wants Meredith to perform in her little village during a music festival to be held in a few short months. Nadya is an amateur pianist who wows Meredith with her musical skill and the two fall deeply in love. As their relationship unfolds, Nadya is forced to choose between Meredith and supporting her small town as its people fight against encroaching Nazis. Later, she and John return together to America to help spread the word about Russia's plight during a musical tour of the states.

Again, the character of Nadya provides a working metaphor for the Soviet nation and the idealized woman. She, like her predecessors, often represents a union of opposites. She is young in appearance yet wise in maternal wisdom as she teaches the youth of her small town how to play music. She has the folk wisdom supplied by her small town upbringing, but the talent and culture necessary to traverse the more urban population of Moscow. She is delicate and sweet in demeanor, illustrating her more feminine qualities, but her main occupation is tractor driver and

she spends her days working the fields. She is open to love but also thinks she should place reason over her emotions, much like our earlier leading ladies, Ninotchka and Theodore. Nadya is a bit of a conundrum, but she plays all sides in just the right way to capture the American's attention.

Interestingly, it is not romance that inspires her to fight for her country during the Nazi invasion, for she already has the necessary skills and commitment to country. In fact, when Meredith initially requests her hand in marriage Nadya responds, "I have a great responsibility, to my family and to my village, to the way which I've lived. And I don't see how I could build a life with you and then also help to build a better and better life for my country." Later, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Nadya exhibits her fearlessness as she performs typical "soldier" duties such as teaching the village children how to construct Molotov cocktails, manhandles a gun, and joins up with a guerrilla league of fighters.

But even as Nadya stands as an exemplary female—feminine in appearance and gesture, but masculine enough to perform a soldier's duty and committed to the cause of her country—there is a bigger opportunity at hand. Meredith would like Nadya to join him in a crusade to spread the message of solidarity and unity between the two countries to the American people. Nadya, limitless in her combat skills, is terrified of playing in front of a large audience. It is only through the support and encouragement of her husband Meredith, that she truly gains the courage to fight her fears and support the war effort through her musical talent. In an earlier scene, Meredith has invited Nadya to return to America with him to accompany his orchestra on piano. She protests, "But I'm not good enough..." with downcast eyes. But wartime calls up the bravery in Nadya at the end of the film. A battlefield scene towards the close of the film illustrates to Nadya the power she and Meredith will have in uniting their musical talent. After the death of a peasant child, a guerrilla soldier suggests they return to the U.S. to spread the message of the Soviet tragedy. He says, "We

would be proud to have you here with us Mr. Meredith, it would be a great honor, but I'm afraid it is not the right way...There is so much more that you can do. You can go back to your country and tell them what you have seen here. You are a great musician and your people respect you and whether you speak to them in words or in music they will know it to be the truth." Nadya is transformed, again, through the love of her country and the desire to support her male husband as helpmate in support of the larger cause. As a final note, Nadya is further linked to Mother Russia and the ideal of unity between the two nations, through the playing of the song "And Russia is Her Name." This song is repeated throughout the film, but it importantly appears at the moment Meredith begins to first fall for Nadya on a date in a Moscow restaurant. The words of the refrain embody the beauty and passion of Nadya as a representative of the Soviet people, and the devotion and aid the United States can provide in her time of need:

When I was young, I gave my heart away,  
Her cheeks were all the cherry trees that bloom in May  
Her eyes were stars that lit the darkness with a silver flame  
And she is still my love, and Russia is her name  
She stood beside my plow, she kissed away my tears  
And warmed my empty hands, through all the empty years

Another wartime production focusing on the survival of art and culture within the war zone is RKO production, *Days of Glory* starring Gregory Peck and Russian ballerina, Tamara Tourmanova. In this production as in *Song of Russia*, the legacy of pre-Soviet Russia is emphasized as something worth saving and the film's small band of guerrilla fighters appear to be fighting for Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Tchaikovsky, not socialism.<sup>84</sup> Written and produced by Casey Robinson (a conservative married to Tourmanova) and directed by Jacques Turner (a lackluster director who was decidedly more effective directing macabre horror films), the film was the last pro-Soviet

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<sup>84</sup> Robinson, 122-123.



feature to hit the silver screen in June 1944. Like *North Star* and *Song of Russia*, the film tells the story of a small band of guerrilla fighters hiding out in the basement of an abandoned church. Like other films, the plot is simple and offers a complex view of women's roles in the war torn Soviet Union. Vladimir (Gregory Peck) and his ragtag group of guerrilla fighters consisting of a drunkard, a blacksmith, a teenage brother and sister, a female sniper, a depressed soldier, and a professor, are preparing for a surprise attack on the Nazis. Upon returning to his encampment from headquarters, Vladimir discovers the group has given refuge to a new member, a former dancer from the Bolshoi ballet, who became lost in the woods while making her way to the front line to entertain the troops. Immediately positioned as an outsider by her pacifist beliefs, the glamorous and urbane Nina (Tourmanova) can only offer her dancing as a skill. Her inability to fulfill a needed occupation within the group is first emphasized at the dinner table. Young Olga says, "You can cook? Or scrub?" Nina shakes her head no to which Olga queries, "And you're a woman?!" Nina then responds, "I'm a dancer. I can dance!" This does not impress the group and for many days Nina feels an outsider. Nina tries to adjust to the new group, offering the best of pre-Revolutionary Russian culture as a token of her appreciation for shelter. She is clearly an ambassador of Old Russia and representative of the cultural arts as she cites a poem from Pushkin by heart and performs a spontaneous ballet for teenage guerrilla fighter, Mitya.

But this is not enough. Nina, frequently compared to female sniper, Yelena (*Mission to Moscow's* Tanya Litvinov), must earn her keep. Here, the film supplies an interesting comparison of female appropriations. We have previously discussed how old films seek to join binary opposites together as a woman must adopt traditional male roles, yet still possesses feminine qualities of beauty, kindness, and maternal skills. In *Days of Glory*, we see these two embodiments illustrated by two different female characters with very different features (Nina is brunette while Yelena is

blond) and attitudes (Nina does not know how to fight while Yelena is a darn good shooter). First let us examine Nina; dismayed at the act of killing, she is a pacifist, an advocate of the arts, and a nurturer of the two young teenagers present in the hideout. Nina is at her strongest when she acts as a maternal figure toward Mitya and Olga. She makes Mitya feel special when she performs a dance solely for him and later, after his death she comforts Olga by lifting him up to the status of a saint. She says, "I saw a big shining medal on his heart...and all the children on the benches will look at Mitya's picture and they all will envy him for having given up his life for his country so courageously." The film even makes a special point of Nina's protective and maternal nature, linking her image with that of the Mother Mary. Upon returning from Mitya's death, Nina positions herself in front of a mini-altar to the Virgin. The altar consists of a small wooden shelf, a candle, and a picture of the Christ child being cradled by his mother. Nina is positioned directly in front of this picture, and as she reaches up to place an untied scarf upon her head, her body position, expression, and the appearance of the hanging scarf make her an identical replica of the religious icon. Nina represents the virtues and values of a righteous woman even though she refuses to fight. But her stance on this issue will evolve as the film continues.

As a foil to Nina's purity is Yelena, a skilled sniper. At one dinner scene, Vladimir asks Yelena about her killing record for the day. Yelena replies casually, "Well, 63." Yelena is occupying a male's role within the guerrilla team, but she also is capable of performing traditional female duties such as cooking and cleaning. Her appearance in a tidy, square-shaped jacket and dress with a gun as accessory, deny her any feminine softness. At the beginning of the film, neither woman fits the prescribed gender coding so common in WW II films. A closer study reveals the film also may also contain a message about female sexuality. It can be presumed that Yelena and Vladimir have engaged in a sexual relationship, but one that is purely physical and devoid of love. This is

confirmed by Yelena's constant jealousy of Nina and Vladimir's confession of their relationship after spending a night with Nina in the woods and exchanging a passionate kiss. Yelena is later killed as a result of Vladimir's choice to send her on a secret mission rather than Nina. The message contained is that sex without true love is deadly, much like the femme fatales received just punishment for immoral actions in 1940s potboilers.

The two female types, the mother and the soldier, are finally joined together in the film when Nina begins to participate in fighting. She is first initiated into warfare when a captured Nazi soldier attempts to attack her and she responds by shooting him dead. Impressed by her courage Vladimir then invites Nina to aid him in blowing up a German ammunition train. During the operation, Vladimir witnesses the gunning down of two Nazi parachute jumpers. His thrill at their killing is palpable, noted by the gleam in his eye and his raised voice. Nina is still uncomfortable with the act of killing and finds Vladimir's lust for the act appalling. She says, "That look in your eyes...please don't be angry with me. I saw that look last night when you exploded the train and before it, when you almost killed a German...as if to kill something, to destroy it, gives you happiness." Vladimir replies, "When you destroy something you greatly love, you learn to love to destroy." But both Vladimir and Nina have something to teach one another, and by the end of the film, Nina has returned him to the pleasures of romance and he has given her the bravery to fight alongside him for her country. The film concludes with the guerrilla fighters advancing on the Nazis in an effort to drive them from the countryside. Nina, loading Vladimir's gun and reciting the guerrillas' oath of honor, is fully converted to the cause.

## **Conclusion**

When we consider both the Russophobic and Russophoric films of the late 1930s and early to mid-1940s, several trends emerge in the representations of women. In the 1930s ideological conflict, materialism, and female sexuality are the essential tools of representing the Soviet debate. The woman is represented as a lover, dangerous and alluring while also changeable at the hands of the right man. In the 1940s, Soviet pictures became less acerbic and presented the Soviet people in a more positive light. This was achieved by positioning the woman as either a daughter or mother of the native land dutifully supporting her nation through whatever means necessary while retaining her feminine qualities. It is not enough to say that these two representations of women exist in Hollywood films of this time. It is also important to recognize their meaning and influence on the American psyche.

To illustrate this point, I turn to Edward Said's theory of *Orientalism*. While Said wrote this seminal text as an observation of Western treatment of Middle Eastern cultures and people, its theories have universal implications. A key point of his argument is how Europeans used Orientalism, specifically defining the lands as a place of purity and spiritual mystery, to define themselves as a superior race and thereby justify imperialistic actions and colonization.<sup>85</sup> The United States uses representations of the Soviet woman in a similar fashion, but instead of highlighting the differences between Soviet and American culture, Hollywood films force the Russian female through a process of Americanization in each of its films. During pre-War years, the narrative wooed her with promises of passionate love affairs and material possessions; during the war it placed her alongside American mothers and daughters fighting to preserve their nation and edify their men.

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<sup>85</sup> Said, 52.

As a final note, it is important to examine how these images may have influenced contemporary culture today. It should be noted that none of the images provided in the films analyzed serve as true representations of Soviet women during the timeframe. Rather these are stock images created by the United States that provide an understanding of *our* unique perception of the Soviet Union. As such, the tropes of lover and mother have been available to rework and refashion our relationship with Russia up until present day. As noted by Heller, quoting Richard Slotkin, "...myth, by nurturing cultural nostalgia for an idealized past, is not necessarily in conflict with history, but rather assists in the ongoing process of critically shaping and re-evaluating the 'functional relations between cultural constructions and "material" reality.'"<sup>86</sup> I would argue that the cinematic Soviet female then is a "myth" constructed by Hollywood to make sense of Soviet realities for the American population. This myth persists in the popular media today, as complexities between aiding Russia and reprimanding its actions still occur (note: during the development of this thesis Russia has invaded the independent territory of Ukraine).

I will close then with a present day example of modern media's adoption of the lover and mother stereotypes as personifications of Russia by examining the contemporary FX series, *The Americans*. The television series depicts two Soviet intelligence agents posing as a married couple in Washington, DC circa 1980, at the height of the Cold War. Each week the couple spies on new developments in Washington government, delivering neat packages of government intelligence documents to their handler. But many of the more important scenes tend to focus on the overriding issues of love, marriage, and family rather than the dangers of espionage (although this aspect of the series is never abandoned). The most compelling character featured in the series is Elizabeth Jennings (Keri Russell), the covert Soviet spy who is also mother to two American-born

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<sup>86</sup> Heller quoting Richard Slotkin, page 107.

children. A frequent narrative hook focuses on the decisions Elizabeth must make when faced with protecting her family versus fighting for her ideology. She is constantly challenged with being right on a global scale or being right on a personal level. She struggles to remain loyal to her marriage and children, particularly when her communist ideals or work as a spy is a more immediate need. The willingness of the series to grapple with matters of the heart through the eyes of a strong female protagonist certainly echoes past portrayals of Russians in American film. In addition, the duplicitous depiction of Elizabeth as a sexual threat to ideology and as a gentle mother seeking to instill values, hope, and love in her children, perpetuates the stereotypes setup by Hollywood films of the 1930s and 40s. It fails to deliver a true picture of the Soviet women, but one that has been pushed through the wringer of the American national myth.

## Appendices<sup>87</sup>

### Appendix 1

A comprehensive list of Hollywood films about the Soviet Union produced during 1933-1945. A single asterisk (\*) indicates presence of conversion plot. A double asterisk (\*\*) indicates positioning of the Soviet Union as a vulnerable woman transformed into a heroic fighter for the motherland (most often through the assistance of an American male character or an American actor playing a Soviet male).

Depiction of the Soviet Union ranges from Middling (MID) to Critical (CRI) to Favorable (FAV) as analyzed by Strada and Troper. Films were rated based on a screening of available films or reading print reviews or screenplays for undistributed features.

Title of Film	Release Date, Studio, Director	Synopsis	Depiction of U.S.S.R.
<i>After Tonight</i>	November 10, 1933 RKO Radio Pictures George Archainbaud	While romancing a beautiful Russian countess, a captain in the Austrian intelligence service is assigned to capture "K-14", a clever spy who has so far managed to remain undetected. What the captain doesn't know is that he is actually closer to the spy than he realizes. ~Frank Fob, IMDB Website	MID
<i>British Agent</i>	September 15, 1934 First National Pictures Michael Curtiz	<i>British Agent</i> starring the Hungarian/British actor Leslie Howard in the title role, was directed by full-fledged Hungarian Michael Curtiz, and costarred American leading lady Kay Francis as a Russian spy. Based on the memoirs of R. H. Bruce Lockhart, who had been the unofficial British emissary to the Russian Revolutionary government in 1917, <i>British Agent</i> spends more time on its romantic subplot than in recreating the birth of Bolshevism... ~Hal Erickson, All Movie Guide	MID

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<sup>87</sup> The arrangement of this appendix is modeled after a similar structuring and formatting applied by Sidenova in her thesis "Mother Russia and Her Daughters." The information contained differs, with additional filmographies for pre-WW II films and different screenshot examples from films discussed in this paper.

<i>The Scarlet Empress</i>	September 15, 1934 Paramount Studios Josef von Sternberg	Young Princess Sophia of Germany is taken to Russia to marry the half-wit Grand Duke Peter, son of the Empress. The domineering Empress hopes to improve the royal blood line. Sophia doesn't like her husband, but she likes Russia, and is very fond of Russian soldiers. She dutifully produces a son -- of questionable fatherhood, but no one seems to mind that. After the old empress dies, Sophia engineers a coup d'etat with the aid of the military, does away with Peter, and becomes Catherine the Great. ~John Oswalt, IMDB Website	CRI
<i>We Live Again</i>	November 1, 1934 Samuel Goldwyn Rouben Mamoulian	Nekhlyudov, a Russian nobleman serving on a jury, discovers that the young girl on trial, Katusha, is someone he once seduced and abandoned and that he himself bears responsibility for reducing her to crime. He sets out to redeem her and himself in the process. ~Jim Beaver, IMDB Website	MID
<i>Once in a Blue Moon</i>	May 10, 1935 Hecht-MacArthur Productions Ben Hecht, Charles MacArthur	A group of Russian nobles fleeing the Bolshevik revolution meet up with a traveling circus. To escape their pursuers, they disguise themselves as members of the circus troupe. ~IMDB Website	MID
<i>Espionage</i>	February 26, 1937 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer	When informant La Forge goes to rival Paris news bureaus to report that arms dealer Anton Kronskey is leaving Paris by train that night, bureau chief Alfred Hartrix can't send star reporter Patricia Booth because her passport has been revoked. She steals his passport, though, because it has an unrecognizable photo of him and his wife Sarah on it, then tricks Simmons, another reporter, into giving her the assignment. Meanwhile, rival bureau chief Doyle assigns famous novelist Kenneth Stevens to the story because his star reporter, Bill Cordell, wants to spend time in Paris with a new girl... ~TCM Website	MID



<i>The Soldier and the Lady</i>	April 9, 1937 RKO Radio Pictures George Nichols Jr.	In Siberia, in 1879, allied Tartar and Mongol hordes, under the leadership of the vulgar rebel Ivan Ogareff, pillage the land and threaten Tsar Alexander II's rule. From Russia, Alexander II dispatches courier Michael Strogoff to deliver secret military plans to Grand Duke Vladimir, 2,500 miles away at Irkutsk, a Siberian town that is now isolated because telegraph lines have been cut. Because his journey will take him through the town where his mother Martha resides, Michael must deny his natural inclination and pledge not to see her, so that his true identity will not be discovered... ~TCM Website	FAV
<i>Tovarich</i>	December 25, 1937 Warner Brothers Anatole Litvak	Ousted from their homeland by the Bolshevik revolution, a royal Russian couple find themselves impoverished and living in Paris. They take positions as butler and housemaid in a wealthy household and, owing to their impeccable breeding and manners, excel in their new jobs. But once they are recognized for the royal couple they are, they must face new -- and formidable -- responsibilities. ~ Dan Navarro, IMDB Website	MID
<i>Spawn of the North</i>	August 26, 1938 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Henry Hathway	Two Alaskan salmon fishermen, Tyler Dawson (skipper of the "Who Cares") and Jim Kimmerlee of the "Old Reliable," are lifelong pals. Their romantic rivalry over young Dian ends amicably. But a more serious rift, with violent consequences, arises when Tyler befriends Russian fish pirates while Jim finds himself aligned with local vigilantes. Notable glacier scenery. ~ Rod Crawford, IMDB Website	CRI
<i>Ninotchka</i> *	October 6, 1939 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Ernst Lubitsch	Soviet emissaries Buljanoff, Iranoff, and Kopalski no sooner arrive in Paris to sell some jewelry for the government, than soft capitalist ways begin to corrupt them. Grand Duchess Swana, former owner of the jewels but now exiled in Paris, sends her very good friend, playboy Leon d'Algout, to interfere with the sale. When sly Leon meets stern Comrade Nina Ivanovna, sent to take over from the hapless emissaries, east-west romance results; but major complications intervene...~Rob Crawford, IMDB Website	MID

<i>Balalaika</i>	December 29, 1939 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Reinhold Schuznel	In the days of Czarist Russia, it is love at first sight when Peter, a prince in the Czarist regime and an officer in the Cossack army, sees Lydia, a cabaret singer. Realizing that Lydia, whose brother and father are leaders of the revolutionary movement, would never fraternize with a member of the aristocracy, Peter disguises himself as a student and the two fall in love. Their romance is shattered when Lydia discovers Peter's true identity... ~TCM Website	FAV
<i>Public Deb No 1</i>	September 13, 1940 20 <sup>th</sup> Century Fox Gregory Ratoff	When a waiter gives a society girl a public spanking for attending a communist rally, her soup-tycoon uncle makes the waiter a vice-president of his company. ~IMDB Website	MID
<i>Comrade X *</i>	December 13, 1940 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer King Vidor	McKinley B. "Mac" Thompson, American reporter in Moscow, smuggles out uncensored news under the alias "Comrade X," but hotel valet Vanya discovers his secret. Vanya fears for the safety of his daughter Golubka ("Theodore") and blackmails Mac into helping her leave the country. Mac is happier about his task once he meets lovely Theodore, but can he convince her of his sincerity? The anti-communist humor becomes alternately grim and farcical. ~Rod Crawford, IMDB Website	CRI
<i>He Stayed for Breakfast*</i>	January 10, 1941 Alexander Hall Columbia Pictures	Paul Beliot, a Communist organizer working as a waiter in Paris, shoots a coffee cup from the hand of fat capitalist Maurice Duval because the banker's lifted pinky finger annoys him. Disguised as a policeman in order to elude the authorities, Paul takes refuge in the apartment of Marianne Duval, the banker's estranged wife. Intrigued by the fugitive, Marianne hides him in her apartment, but with a round-the-clock guard surrounding the building, he becomes trapped. This causes problems when Duval visits his estranged wife and newspaper publisher Andre Dorlay comes to court her. As Marianne juggles three men, Paul tries to convert her maid, Doreta, and denounces Capitalism and preaches revolution until he becomes accustomed to living in luxury and is enchanted by Marianne's beauty... ~TCM Website	MID

<i>Miss V from Moscow**</i>	November 23, 1942 Albert Herman M&H Productions	Vera Marova is a Russian spy impersonating a dead German spy whom she closely resembles. Her ally is Steve Worth, an American serving in the British armed services, and the two work with the Free French underground agents in Paris to send secret radio messages to Moscow that save the American convoys from German submarines. ~Les Adams, IMDB Website	FAV
<i>Action in the North Atlantic</i>	June 12, 1943 Lloyd Bacon Warner Brothers	Lieutenant Joe Rossi is 1st Officer on a Liberty Ship in a great convoy bound from Halifax to Murmansk. After German subs crush the convoy his ship loses the convoy and is heading alone to Murmansk. In spite of attacks by German planes and subs he gets the ship safely to Murmansk. ~ Stephan Eichenberg, IMDB Website	FAV
<i>Mission to Moscow</i>	May 22, 1943 Michael Curtiz Warner Brothers	<i>Mission to Moscow</i> was made at the behest of F.D.R. in order to garner more support for the Soviet Union during WW II. It was based on the memoir by Joseph E. Davies, former U.S. Ambassador To Russia. The movie covers the political machinations in Moscow just before the start of the war and presents Stalin's Russia in a very favorable light. So much so, that the movie was cited years later by the House Un-American Activities Commission and was largely responsible for the screenwriter, Howard Koch being blacklisted. ~E. Barry Bruyea, IMDB	FAV
<i>The North Star**</i>	November 4, 1943 Lewis Milestone Samuel Goldwyn Company	The hard working but happy members of the North Star find their way of life shattered when Germany, in defiance of previous treaties, storms the nation and begins a brutal occupation. Dr. Otto Von Harden ( <u>Erich Von Stroheim</u> ) begins gathering children -- who are to be used for blood transfusions and medical experiments. Many of the outraged farmers take to the hills to fight with the anti-Nazi resistance, while those who stay behind bravely destroy precious crops and materiel rather than turn them over to the Nazi war machine... ~Mark Demming, All Movie Guide	FAV

<i>Three Russian Girls</i>	January 14, 1944 Henry S. Kesler R-F Productions	Another of a wartime cycle of Hollywood films lauding the praises of America's Soviet allies, <i>Three Russian Girls</i> is a remake of Russia's <i>The Girl From Stalingrad</i> . Set just after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, the film stars Anna Sten as Natasha, a Red Cross volunteer who is dispatched to a field hospital located in an old pre-revolution mansion. American test pilot John Hill (Kent Smith), who'd been in Russia on a goodwill mission, is wounded in battle and brought to the hospital. As he slowly recovers from his wounds, Hill falls in love with Natasha. A last-act crisis develops when the hospital personnel are forced to move immediately to Leningrad as the Nazis advance. ~Hal Erickson, All Movie Guide	FAV
<i>Song of Russia**</i>	February 10, 1944 Gregory Ratoff Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer	Based on <i>Scorched Earth</i> , a story by Leo Mittler, the film stars Robert Taylor as John Meredith, a famous American symphony conductor who is touring Russia just before the war. Meredith falls in love with Russian lass Nadya Stepanova (Susan Peters), who impresses him with her conviviality and charm: why, she's almost like a typical American girl! In the course of their romance, Meredith and Nadya visit a collective farm, where the peasants sing, dance and smile all day. The lovers marry, only to have their honeymoon abruptly halted when the Nazis invade the Soviet Union. Nadya promptly joins the Resistance, solemnly assembling molotov cocktails and shooting down Germans with her comrades. Just before the Nazis swarm into Nadya's village, the peasants set fire to the place so that Hitler's minions will not be able to plunder its resources...~ Hal Erickson, All Movie Guide	FAV

<i>Days of Glory</i> **	June 16, 1944 Jacques Tournier RKO Radio Pictures	Like <i>Song of Russia</i> and <i>Mission to Moscow</i> before it, <i>Days of Glory</i> is a paean to the courage and resourcefulness of the Soviet Union during WW II (this was long before the Russians became the stock villains in Hollywood films!) Producer Casey Robinson took a gamble with the project, casting the leading roles with movie newcomers. Heading the cast is Broadway actor Gregory Peck as Vladimir, the leader of a band of Soviet guerrilla fighters. Tamara Toumanova, former premier ballerina of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, costars as Nina, whose love for Vladimir is surpassed by her love for Mother Russia (Toumanova was at the time the wife of producer Robinson). ~ Hal Erickson, All Movie Guide	FAV
<i>Counter-Attack</i>	April 26, 1945 Zoltan Korda Columbia Pictures	Set during WW II, the film centers on a Russian officer, a Russian woman, and seven German soldiers who have been trapped in the ruined cellar of a bombed out factory in a Nazi-controlled town. While waiting for someone to rescue them, the two Russians try to keep the Germans away. Eventually the Russian officer begins toying with a German officer and vice versa as both seek to extract information from the other. The Russian lets on that his troops are planning to construct a tunnel beneath the river. The woman is appalled at this betrayal of information, but her companion reassures her that he can kill the enemy before they have time to share that information. But first they need to get rescued...~Sandra Brennan, All Movie Guide	FAV

## Appendix II: Illustrations from Hollywood's Soviet Films

### 2.1 Stills from *Ninotchka*, MGM, 1939

Ninotchka transforms from a dour, Soviet commissar into a sensuous, materialistic lover of Leon and Capitalism.

#### Pre-Conversion:



Ninotchka meeting the three Soviet emissaries Buljanoff, Iranoff, and Kopalski in her drab uniform.



Count Leon shows Ninotchka where the Eiffel Tower is located on a map.



Ninotchka at a Parisian café, requests something 'simple' emphasizing her Spartan tastes.

#### During Conversion:



Leon tells a humorous joke breaking down Ninotchka's cold exterior.



Ninotchka ponders her appearance in the high fashion hat, a symbol of the materialistic pleasures of Capitalism.



Ninotchka meets Leon, now open to romance and materialistic pleasures.

#### Post-Conversion:



Ninotchka, drunk from champagne, wearing the crown jewels, and in her "confection-like" gown.



Ninotchka melts in the arms of Leon.



Ninotchka carries the spirit of freedom and Capitalism back to the Soviet Union.

## 2.2 Stills from *Comrade X*, MGM, 1940

Theodore transforms from a hardnosed, pro-Soviet advocate to an American immigrant who loves hot dogs and the Brooklyn Dodgers as McKinley Thomson's wife.

### Pre-Conversion:



Theodore meets McKinley B. Thompson, aka "Mac" while driving a streetcar.



Theodore exhibits her aggressive behavior and mannish appearance. Mac sees the beautiful woman hidden inside the ideological rant.



Mac's overly emotional secretary proclaims "Russia is suffering and beauty!"

### During and Post- Conversion:



Mac and Theodore share a first kiss during his attempt to recruit her to spread Communism in America.



Mac is confused by the post card marriage process in Russia. Theodore has been married twice before.



Theodore dreams of converting the masses from boogie woogie as Mac's wife.



Theodore's wedding night wardrobe: a thick woolen nightgown.



Mac lures Theodore toward Capitalism with the gift of a silken negligee. She swaps this for her subdued woolen gown.



Mac and Theodore cheer on the Brooklyn Dodgers as they murder the Reds!

2.3 Depictions of America's idealized wartime woman. Her appearance is sensuous and soft; she is adorned with soft ringlets swept gently away from lacquered lips, flushed cheeks, and darkened brows and lashes. She also exhibits strong muscles and a set jaw indicating she is self-sufficient and strong. The images below represent a hybrid of the most valued masculine and female qualities in America during WW II.



J. Howard Miller, *We Can Do It!*, 1943



Dan V. Smith, *This is My War Too!*, 1943



## 2.4 Stills from *The North Star*, Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1943

Examples of women as symbols of Mother Russia and illustrations of female suffering:



The Pavlov family as mother, daughter, and sister. The Pavlov family links the country of Russia to women's familial roles.



Sophia Pavlov cradles the lifeless body of daughter, Olga. She is dumbstruck but puts on a brave face for her husband.



A village woman prepares to burn down her home and village to aid in Stalin's "scorched earth" approach.

Illustrations of violence against Soviet children at the hands of German soldiers:



The children of the North Star. The film never lets us forget the purity of children and their decimation in the face of war.



One of the many injured children shown throughout *The North Star*. This child was injured during the Nazi invasion on the road to Kiev.



Clavdia and Marina observe the child. They are positioned above him like little attentive mothers, filled with concern and compassion.

Depictions of female bravery:



Clavdia begs for strength as she follows Dimitri into the woods to distract the Nazi soldiers.



Marina speaks out against war at the end of the film. She is hopeful to build a new future but realizes it won't be the same as the past.

## 2.5 Stills from *Song of Russia*, MGM, 1944

### Nadya as Loyal Daughter:



Nadya Stepanova requests John Meredith to perform at her small village.



A statue of Stalin is highlighted during Nadya and John's tour of Moscow.



Nadya looks at John Meredith with skepticism after he proclaims his love. "*And Russia is Her Name*" has just played.

### Nadya as Lover and Fighter:



Nadya operates a threshing machine on farmland in her hometown. She is capable of working a man's occupation.



A closeup on Nadya's face. Her traditional wardrobe and determined expression indicates she is loyal to family, village, and country.



A shot of John and Nadya as newlyweds. This is their only moment of peace before the German invasion and declaration of war.



Nadya questions her talent as a piano player. She wonders if she will be good enough to accompany John.



Nadya says goodbye to John as he continues his tour and she remains behind to fight the Nazis. She is sacrificing her relationship with him for her country.



Nadya and John play together at Carnegie Hall. Together, they will spread the message of Russia's plight to the American people.

## 2.5 Stills from *Days of Glory*, RKO Radio Pictures, 1944

### Juxtaposition of Nina and Yelena:



Yelena, in a military uniform and badge, preps her rival while Nina sits at the table fidgeting with her jacket.



Nina invites Mitya to attend a pretend ballet. Here, she pretends to step on the stage and peek through the curtains.



Yelena chastises Nina for her sympathy toward a captured Nazi soldier.

### Nina as Maternal Figure:



Nina brings a fellow soldier some hot tea to warm him at his post.



Nina framed by the image of Mother Mary in the background.



Nina wears a head scarf and sits in a position that mimics religious iconography as she comforts Olga.

### Nina as Lover and Fighter:



Nina is forced to shoot a Nazi prisoner of war when he tries to escape the underground bunker.



Nina, now empowered by killing the Nazi soldier is invited to join the other guerrilla fighters in a raid.



Nina joins Vladimir as they fight to the death. She supports him by reloading his gun, assuring him of their love, and citing the guerrilla oath in the midst of artillery fire.

## 2.6 Stills and promotional shots from *The Americans*, an FX Series, 2012-2014



The Jennings family portrait. Here, Elizabeth Jennings is relatable as the matriarch of the family who loves and nurtures her family.



Elizabeth Jennings, again as a maternal figure who is perfect homemaker: baker, caretaker of the children, and loving wife.



Elizabeth Jennings' other side: seductress. She is sexual, unpredictable, and dangerous. She represents the uncontrollable Russia the US simultaneously fears and seeks to control.



Again, Elizabeth Jennings' as temptress. Her altered appearance serves dual functions, moving the plot forward and heightening the danger of her femininity by illustrating her deceptive personality.

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